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ONE OF OUR CONQUERORS.

BY
GEORGE MEREDITH.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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CONTENTS OF VOL. II.

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. ACCOUNTS FOR SKEPSEY'S MISCONDUCT ; SHOW- ING HOW IT AFFECTED NATALY ...	1
II. CHIEFLY UPON THE THEME OF A YOUNG MAID'S IMAGININGS	20
III. SUITORS FOR THE HAND OF NESTA VICTORIA	41
IV. TREATS OF NATURE AND CIRCUMSTANCE, AND THE DISSENSION BETWEEN THEM AND OF A SATIRIST'S MALIGNITY IN THE DIRECTION OF HIS COUNTRY ...	67
V. THE GREAT ASSEMBLY AT LAKELANDS ...	104
VI. DARTREY FENELLAN	131
VII. CONCERNS THE INTRUSION OF JARNIMAN ...	166
VIII. TREATS OF THE LADIES' LAPDOG TASSO FOR AN INSTANCE OF MOMENTOUS EFFECTS PRODUCED BY VERY MINOR CAUSES	185
IX. NESTA'S ENGAGEMENT	213
X. NATALY IN ACTION	243

CHAPTER	PAGE
XI. IN WHICH WE SEE A CONVENTIONAL GENTLE- MAN ENDEAVOURING TO EXAMINE A SPECTRE OF HIMSELF	265
XII. CONTAINS WHAT IS A SMALL THING OR A GREAT, AS THE SOUL OF THE CHIEF ACTOR MAY DECIDE	278
XIII. MRS. MARSETT	295

ONE OF OUR CONQUERORS.

CHAPTER I.

ACCOUNTS FOR SKEPSEY'S MISCONDUCT, SHOW-
ING HOW IT AFFECTED NATALY.

His master opened on the bristling business.

“What’s this, of your name in the papers, your appearing before a magistrate, and a fine? Tell the tale shortly.”

Skepsey fell upon his attitude for dialectical defence: the modest form of the two hands at rolling play and the head deferentially sidecast. But knowing that he had gratified his personal tastes in the act of serving his master’s interests, an interfusion of sentiments plunged him into self-consciousness; an unwonted state with him, clogging to a simple story.

“First, sir, I would beg you to pardon the printing of your name beside mine . . .”

“Tush : on with you.”

“Only to say, necessitated by the circumstances of the case. I read, that there was laughter in the court at my exculpation of my conduct—as I have to call it ; and there may have been. I may have expressed myself. . . . I have a strong feeling for the welfare of the country.”

“So, it seems, you said to the magistrate. Do you tell me, that the cause of your gross breach of the law, was a consideration for the welfare of the country? Run on the facts.”

“The facts—I must have begun badly, sir.” Skepsey rattled the dry facts in his head to right them. From his not having begun well, they had become dry as things underfoot. It was an error to have led off with the sentiments. “Two very, two very respectable persons—respectable—were desirous to witness a short display of my, my system, I would say ; of my science, they call it.”

“Don’t be nervous. To the point; you went into a field five miles out of London, in broad day, and stood in a ring, the usual riff-raff about you!”

“With the gloves: and not for money, sir: for the trial of skill; not very many people. I cannot quite see the breach of the law.”

“So you told the magistrate. You were fined for your inability to quite see. And you had to give security.”

“Mr. Durance was kindly responsible for me, sir: an acquaintance of the magistrate.”

“This boxing of yours is a positive mania, Skepsey. You must try to get the better of it—must! And my name too! I’m to be proclaimed, as having in my service an inveterate pugilist—who breaks the law from patriotism! Male or female, these very respectable persons—the people your show was meant for?”

“Male, sir. Females! . . . that is, not the respectable ones.”

“Take the opinion of the respectable ones for your standard of behaviour in future.”

"It was a mere trial of skill, sir, to prove to one of the spectators, that I could be as good as my word. I wished, I may say, to conciliate him, partly. He would not—he judged by size—credit me with . . . he backed my adversary Jerry Scroom—a sturdy boxer, without the knowledge of the first principles."

"You beat him?"

"I think I taught the man that I could instruct, sir; he was complimentary before we parted. He thought I could not have lasted. After the second round, the police appeared."

"And you ran!"

"No, sir; I had nothing on my conscience."

"Why not have had your pugilistic display in a publican's room in town, where you could have hammer-nailed and ding-donged to your heart's content for as long as you liked!"

"That would have been preferable, from the point of view of safety from intrusion, I can admit—speaking humbly. But one of the parties—I had a wish to gratify him—is a lover of old English times and habits and

our country scenes. He wanted it to take place on green grass. We drove over Hampstead in three carts and a gig, as a company of pleasure—as it was. A very beautiful morning. There was a rest at a public-house. Mr. Shaplow traces the misfortune to that. Mr. Jarniman, I hear, thinks it what he calls a traitor in the camp. I saw no sign; we were all merry and friendly.”

“Jarniman?” said Victor sharply. “Who is the Jarniman?”

“Mr. Jarniman is, I am to understand from the acquaintance introducing us—a Mr. Shaplow I met in the train from Lakelands one day, and again at the corner of a street near Drury Lane, a ham and beef shop kept by a Mrs. Jarniman, a very stout lady, who does the chief carving in the shop, and is the mother of Mr. Jarniman: he is in a confidential place, highly trusted.” Skepsey looked up from the hands he soaped: “He is a curious mixture; he has true enthusiasm for boxing, he believes in ghosts. He mourns for the lost days of prize-fighting, he thinks that spectres are on the increase. He has

a very large appetite, depressed spirits. Mr. Shaplow informs me he is a man of substance, in the service of a wealthy lady in poor health, expecting a legacy and her appearance to him. He has the look—Mr. Shaplow assures me he does not drink to excess: he is a slow drinker.”

Victor straightened: “Bad way of health, you said?”

“Mr. Jarniman spoke of his expectations as being immediate: he put it, that he expected her spirit to be out for him to meet it any day—or night. He desires it. He says, she has promised it—on oath, he says, and must feel that she must do her duty to him before she goes, if she is to appear to him with any countenance after. But he is anxious for her in any case to show herself, and says, he should not have the heart to reproach her. He has principles, a tear for suffering; he likes to be made to cry. Mrs. Jarniman, his mother, he is not married, is much the same so far, except ghosts; she will not have them; except after strong tea, they come, she says, come to her bed. She

is foolish enough to sleep in a close-curtained bed. But the poor lady is so exceedingly stout that a puff of cold would carry her off, she fears."

Victor stamped his foot. "This man Jarniman serves a lady now in a—serious, does he say? Was he precise?"

"Mr. Jarniman spoke of a remarkable number of diseases; very complicated, he says. He has no opinion of doctors. He says, that the lady's doctor and the chemist—she sits in a chemist's shop and swallows other people's prescriptions that take her fancy. He says, her continuing to live is wonderful. He has no reason to hurry her, only for the satisfaction of a natural curiosity."

"He mentioned her name?"

"No name, sir."

Skepsey's limpid grey eyes confirmed the negative to Victor, who was assured that the little man stood clean of any falsity.

"You are not on equal terms. You and the magistrate have helped him to know who it is *you* serve, Skepsey."

“Would you please to direct me, sir?”

“Another time. Now go and ease your feet with a run over the town. We have music in half an hour. That you like, I know. See chiefly to amusing yourself.”

Skepsey turned to go; he murmured, that he had enjoyed his trip.

Victor checked him: it was to ask whether this Jarniman had specified one, any one of the numerous diseases afflicting his aged mistress.

Now Jarniman had shocked Skepsey with his blunt titles for a couple of the foremost maladies assailing the poor lady's decayed constitution: not to be mentioned, Skepsey thought, in relation to ladies; whose organs and functions we, who pay them a proper homage by restricting them to the sphere so worthily occupied by their mothers up to the very oldest date, respectfully curtain; their accepted masters are chivalrous to them, deploring their need at times for the doctors and drugs. He stood looking most unhappy. “She was to appear, sir, in a few—perhaps a week, a month.”

A nod dismissed him.

The fun of the expedition (and Dudley Sowerby had wound himself up to relish it) was at night in the towns, when the sound of instrumental and vocal music attracted crowds beneath the windows of the hotel, and they heard *zon, zon, violon, flûte et basse*; not bad fluting, excellent fiddling, such singing as a maestro, conducting his own Opera, would have approved. So Victor said of his darlings' voices. Nesta's and her mother's were a perfect combination; Mr. Barmby's trompe in union, sufficiently confirmed the popular impression, that they were artistes. They had been ceremoniously ushered to their carriages, with expressions of gratitude, at the departure from Rouen; and the Boniface at Gisors had entreated them to stay another night, to give an entertainment. Victor took his pleasure in letting it be known, that they were a quiet English family, simply keeping-up the habits they practiced in Old England: all were welcome to hear them while they were doing it; but they did not give entertainments.

The pride of the pleasure of reversing the general idea of English dulness among our neighbours, was perceived to have laid fast hold of Dudley Sowerby at Dreux. He was at the window from time to time, counting heads below. For this reason or a better, he begged Nesta to supplant the flute duet with the soprano and contralto of the Helena section of the *Mefistofele*, called the Serenade : *La Luna immobile*. She consulted her mother, and they sang it. The crowds below, swoln to a block of the street, were dead still, showing the instinctive good manners of the people. Then mademoiselle astonished them with a Provençal or Cevennes air, Huguenot, though she was Catholic; but it suited her mezzo-soprano tones; and it rang massively of the martial-religious. To what heights of spiritual grandeur might not a Huguenot France have marched! Dudley Sowerby, heedlessly, under an emotion that could be stirred in him with force, by the soul of religion issuing through music, addressed his ejaculation to Lady Grace Halley. She did not shrug or snub him, but rejoined :

“I could go to battle with that song in the ears.” She liked seeing him so happily transformed; and liked the effect of it on Nesta when his face shone in talking. He was at home with the girl’s eyes, as he had never been. A song expressing in one the combative and devotional, went to the springs of his blood; for he was of an old warrior race, beneath the thick crust of imposed peaceful maxims and commercial pursuits and habitual stiff correctness. As much as wine, will music bring out the native bent of the civilized man: endow him with language too. He was as if unlocked; he met Nesta’s eyes and ran in a voluble interchange, that gave him flattering afterthoughts; and at the moment sensibly a new and assured, or to some extent assured, station beside a girl so vivid; by which the young lady would be helped to perceive his unvoiced solider gifts.

Nataly observed them, thinking of Victor’s mastering subtlety. She had hoped (having clearly seen the sheep’s eye in the shepherd) that Mr. Barmby would be watchful to act as a block between them; and therefore she

had stipulated for his presence on the journey. She remembered Victor's rapid look of readiness to consent:—he reckoned how naturally Mr. Barmby would serve as a foil to any younger man. Mr. Barmby had tried all along to perform his part: he had always been thwarted; notably once at Gisors, where by some cunning management he and mademoiselle found themselves in the cell of the prisoner's Nail-wrought work while Nesta had to take Sowerby's hand for help at a passage here and there along the narrow outer castle-walls. And Mr. Barmby, upon occasions, had set that dimple in Nesta's cheek quivering, though Simeon Fenellan was not at hand, and there was no telling how it was done, beyond the evidence that Victor willed it so.

From the day of the announcement of Lakelands, she had been brought more into contact with his genius of dexterity and foresight than ever previously: she had bent to the burden of it more; had seen herself and everybody else outstripped—herself, of course; she did not count in a struggle with

him. But since that red dawn of Lakelands, it was almost as if he had descended to earth from the skies. She now saw his mortality in the miraculous things he did. The reason of it was, that through the perceptible various arts and shifts on her level, an opposing spirit had plainer view of his aim, to judge it. She thought it a mean one.

The power it had to hurry her with the strength of a torrent to an end she dreaded, impressed her physically; so far subduing her mind, in consequence, as to keep the idea of absolute resistance obscure, though her bosom heaved with the breath; but what was her own of a mind hung hovering above him, criticizing; and involuntarily, discomfortingly. She could have prayed to be led blindly or blindly dashed on: she could trust him for success; and her critical mind seemed at times a treachery. Still she was compelled to judge.

When he said to her at night, pressing both her hands: "This is the news of the day, my love! It's death at last. We shall soon be thanking heaven for freedom;" her

fingers writhed upon his and gripped them in a torture of remorse on his behalf. A shattering throb of her heart gave her sight of herself as well. For so it is with the woman who loves in subjection, she may be a critic of the man, she is his accomplice.

“You have a letter, Victor?”

“Confirmation all round : Fenellan, Themison, and now Skepsey.”

He told her the tale of Skepsey and Jar-niman, colouring it, as any interested animated conduit necessarily will. Neither of them smiled.

The effort to think soberly exhausted and rolled her back on credulity.

It might not be to-day or next week or month : but so much testimony pointed to a day within the horizon, surely !

She bowed her head to heaven for forgiveness. The murderous hope stood up, stood out in forms and pictures. There was one of a woman at her ease at last in the reception of guests ; contrasting with an ironic haunting figure of the woman of queenly air and stature under a finger of scorn for a

bold-faced impostor. Nataly's lips twitched at the remembrance of quaint whimpers of complaint to the Fates, for directing that a large instead of a rather diminutive woman should be the social offender fearing exposure. Majesty in the criminal's dock, is a confounding spectacle. To the bosom of the majestic creature, all her glorious attributes have become the executioner's implements. She must for her soul's health believe that a day of release and exoneration approaches.

"Barmby!—if my dear girl would like him best," Victor said, in tenderest undertones, observing the shadowing variations of her face; and pierced her cruelly, past explanation or understanding;—not that she would have objected to the Rev. Septimus as officiating clergyman.

She nodded. Down rolled the first big tear.

We cry to women; Land, ho!—a land of palms after storms at sea; and at once they inundate us with a deluge of eye-water.

"Half a minute, dear Victor, not longer," Nataly said, weeping, near on laughing over

his look of wanton abandonment to despair at sight of her tears. "Don't mind me. I am rather like Fenellan's laundress, the tearful woman whose professional apparatus was her soft heart and a cake of soap. Skepsey has made his peace with you?"

Victor answered: "Yes, yes; I see what he has been about. We're a mixed lot, all of us—the best! You've noticed, Skepsey has no laugh: however absurd the thing he tells you, not a smile!"

"But you trust his eyes; you look fathoms into them. Captain Dartrey thinks him one of the men most in earnest of any of his country."

"So Nataly of course thinks the same. And he's a worthy little velocipede, as Fenellan calls him. One wishes Colney had been with us. Only Colney!—pity one can't cut his talons for the space before they grow again."

Ay, and in the presence of Colney Durance, Victor would not have been so encouraging, half boyishly caressing, with Dudley Sowerby! It was the very manner to sow seed of

imitativeness in the girl, devoted as she was to her father. Nataly sighed, foreseeing evil, owning it a superstition, feeling it a certainty. We are easily prophets, sure of being justified, when the cleverness of schemes devoted to material ends appears most delicately perfect. History, the tales of households, the tombstone, are with us to inspire. In Nataly's bosom, the reproof of her inefficiency for offering counsel where Victor for his soul's sake needed it, was beginning to thunder at times as a reproach of unfitness in his mate, worse than a public denunciation of the sin against Society.

It might be decreed that she and Society were to come to reconciliation. A pain previously thought of, never previously so realized, seized her at her next sight of Nesta. She had not taken in her front mind the contrast of the innocent one condemned to endure the shadow from which the guilty was by a transient ceremony released. Nature could at a push be eloquent to defend the guilty. Not a word of vindicating eloquence rose up to clear the innocent. Nothing that

she could do; no devotedness, not any sacrifice, and no treaty of peace, no possible joy to come, nothing could remove the shadow from her child. She dreamed of the succour in eloquence, to charm the ears of chosen juries while a fact spoke over the population, with a relentless rolling out of its one hard word. But eloquence, powerful on her behalf, was dumb when referred to Nesta. It seemed a cruel mystery. How was it permitted by the Merciful Disposer! . . . Nataly's intellect and her reverence clashed. They clash to the end of time if we persist in regarding the Spirit of Life as a remote Externe, who plays the human figures, to bring about this or that issue, instead of being beside us, within us, our breath, if we will; marking on us where at each step we sink to the animal, mount to the divine, we and ours who follow, offspring of body or mind. She was in her error, from judging of the destiny of man by the fate of individuals. Chiefly her error was, to try to be thinking at all amid the fevered tangle of her sensations.

A darkness fell upon the troubled woman, and was thicker overhead when her warm blood had drawn her to some acceptance of the philosophy of existence, in a savour of gratification at the prospect of her equal footing with the world while yet she lived. She hated herself for taking pleasure in anything to be bestowed by a world so hap-hazard, ill-balanced, unjust ; she took it bitterly, with such naturalness as not to be aware that it was irony and a poisonous irony moving her to welcome the restorative ceremony because her largeness of person had a greater than common need of the protection.

CHAPTER II.

CHIEFLY UPON THE THEME OF A YOUNG
MAID'S IMAGININGS.

THAT Mausoleum at Dreux may touch to lift us. History pleads for the pride of the great discrowned Family giving her illumination there. The pride is reverently postured ; the princely mourning-cloak it wears becomingly braided at the hem with fair designs of our mortal humility in the presence of the vanquisher ; against whom, acknowledgeing a visible conquest of the dust, it sustains a placid contention in coloured glass and marbles.

Mademoiselle de Seilles, a fervid Orleanist, was thanked for having advised the curvature of the route homeward to visit "the spot of so impressive a monument:" as it was phrased by the Rev. Septimus Barmby ;

whose exposition to Nesta of the beautiful stained-glass pictures of incidents in the life of the crusading St. Louis, was toned to be likewise impressive:—Colney Durance not being at hand to bewail the pathos of his exhaustless “whacking of the platitudes;” which still retain their tender parts, but cry unheard when there is no cynic near. Mr. Barmby laid-on solemnly.

Professional devoutness is deemed more righteous on such occasions than poetic fire. It robes us in the cloak of the place, as at a funeral. Generally, Mr. Barmby found, and justly, that it is in superior estimation among his countrymen of all classes. They are shown by example how to look, think, speak; what to do. Poets are disturbing; they cannot be comfortably imitated, they are unsafe, not certainly the metal, unless you have Laureates, entitled to speak by their pay and decorations; and these are but one at a time, a dweller in books, good for quoting at best—and a quotation may remind us of a parody, to convulse the sacred dome! Established plain prose officials do better for

our English. The audience moved round with heads of undertakers.

Victor called to recollection Fenellan's "Rev. Glendoveer" while Mr. Barmby pursued his discourse, uninterrupted by tripping wags. And those who have schemes, as well as those who are startled by the criticism in laughter to discover, that they have cause for shunning it, rejoice when wits are absent. Mr. Sowerby and Nesta interchanged a comment on Mr. Barmby's remarks : *The Fate of Princes ! The Paths of Glory !* St. Louis was a very distant Roman Catholic monarch ; and the young gentleman of Evangelical education could admire him as a Crusader. St. Louis was for Nesta a figure in the rich hues of royal Saintship softened to homeliness by tears. She doated on a royalty crowned with the Saint's halo, that swam down to us to lift us through holy human showers. She listened to Mr. Barmby, hearing few sentences, lending his eloquence all she felt : he rolled forth notes of a minster organ, accordant with the devotional service she was holding mutely. Mademoiselle upon

St. Louis: "Worthy to be named King of Kings!" swept her to a fount of thoughts, where the thoughts are not yet shaped, are yet in the breast of the mother emotions. Louise de Seilles had prepared her to be strangely and deeply moved. The girl had a heart of many strings, of high pitch, open to be musical to simplest wandering airs or to the gales. This crypt of the recumbent sculptured figures and the coloured series of acts in the passage of the crowned Saint thrilled her as with sight of flame on an altar-piece of History. But this King in the lines of the Crucifixion leading, gave her a lesson of life, not a message from death. With such a King, there would be union of the old order and the new, cessation to political turmoil: Radicalism, Socialism, all the monster names of things with heads agape in these our days to gobble-up the venerable, obliterate the beautiful, leave a stoniness of floods where field and garden were, would be appeased, transfigured. She hoped, she prayed for that glorious leader's advent.

On one subject, conceived by her only of

late, and not intelligibly, not communicably : a subject thickly veiled ; one which struck at her through her sex and must, she thought, ever be unnamed (the ardent young creature saw it as a very thing torn by the winds to show hideous gleams of a body raging with fire behind the veil) : on this one subject, her hopes and prayers were dumb in her bosom. It signified shame. She knew not the how, for she had no power to contemplate it : there was a torment of earth and a writhing of lurid dust-clouds about it at a glimpse. But if the new crusading Hero were to come attacking *that*—if some born prince nobly man would head the world to take away the withering scarlet from the face of women, she felt she could kiss the print of his feet upon the ground. Meanwhile she had enjoyment of her plunge into the inmost forest-well of mediæval imaginativeness, where youthful minds of good aspiration through their obscurities find much akin to them.

She had an eye for little Skepsey too : unaware that these French Princes had hurried him off to Agincourt, for another encounter

with them and the old result—poor dear gentlemen, with whom we do so wish to be friendly! What amused her was, his evident fatigue in undergoing the slow parade, and sheer deference to his betters, as to the signification of a holiday on arrested legs. Dudley Sowerby's attention to him, in elucidating the scenes with historical scraps, greatly pleased her. The Rev. Septimus of course occupied her chiefly.

Mademoiselle was always near, to receive his repeated expressions of gratitude for the route she had counselled. Without personal objections to a well-meaning orderly man, whose pardonable error it was to be aiming too considerably higher than his head, she did but show him the voluble muteness of a Frenchwoman's closed lips; not a smile at all, and certainly no sign of hostility; when bowing to his reiterated compliment in the sentence of French. Mr. Barmby had noticed (and a strong sentiment rendered him observant, unwontedly) a similar alert immobility of her lips, indicating foreign notions of this kind or that, in England: an all but imper-

ceptible shortening or loss of corners at the mouth, upon mention of marriages of his clergy : particularly once, at his reading of a lengthy report in a newspaper of a Wedding Ceremony involving his favourite Bishop for bridegroom : a report to make one glow like Hymen rollicking the Torch after draining the bumper to the flying slipper. He remembered the look, and how it seemed to intensify on the slumbering features, at a statement, that his Bishop was a widower, entering into nuptials in his fifty-fourth year. Why not? But we ask it of Heaven and Man, why not? Mademoiselle was pleasant : she was young or youngish ; her own clergy were celibates, and—no, he could not argue the matter with a young or youngish person of her sex. Could it be a reasonable woman—a woman!—who disapproved the holy nuptials of the pastors of the flocks? But we are forbidden to imagine the conducting of an argument thereon with a lady :—Luther . . . but we are not in Luther's time :—Nature . . . no, nor can there possibly be allusions to Nature. Mr. Barmby wondered

at Protestant parents taking a Papistical governess for their young flower of English womanhood. However, she venerated St. Louis; he cordially also; there they met; and he admitted, that she had, for a French-woman, a handsome face, and besides an agreeably artificial ingenuousness in the looks which could be so politely dubious as to appear only dubiously adverse.

The spell upon Nesta was not blown away on English ground; and when her father and mother were comparing their impressions, she could not but keep guard over the deeper among her own. At the Château de Gisors, leftward off Vernon on Seine, it had been one of romance and wonderment, with inquisitive historic soundings of her knowledge and mademoiselle's, a reverence for the prisoner's patient holy work, and picturings of his watchful waiting daily, Nail in hand, for the heaven-sent sunlight on the circular dungeon-wall through the slits of the meurtrières. But the Mausoleum at Dreux spake religiously; it enfolded Mr. Barmby, his voice re-edified it. The fact that he had discoursed

there, though not a word of the discourse was remembered, allied him to the spirit of a day rather increasing in sacredness as it receded and left her less the possessor of it, more the worshipper.

Mademoiselle had to say to herself: "Impossible!" after seeing the drift of her dear Nesta's eyes in the wake of the colossal English clergyman. She fed her incredulousness indignantly on the evidence confounding it. Nataly was aware of unusual intonations, treble-stressed, in the *Bethesda* and the *Galilee* of Mr. Barmby on Concert evenings: as it were, the towering wood-work of the cathedral organ in quake under emission of its multitudinous outroar. The "Which?" of the Rev. Septimus, addressed to Nesta, when song was demanded of him; and her "Either;" and his gentle hesitation, upon a gaze at her for the directing choice, could not be unnoticed by women.

Did he know a certain thing?—and dream of urging the suit, as an indulgent skipper of parental pages?—

Such haunting interrogations were the

conspirator's daggers out at any instant, or leaping in sheath, against Nataly's peace of mind. But she trusted her girl's laughing side to rectify any little sentimental overbalancing. She left the ground where maternal meditations are serious, at an image of Mr. Barmby knocking at Nesta's heart as a lover. Was it worth inquiry?

A feminine look was trailed across the eyes of mademoiselle, with mention of Mr. Barmby's name.

Mademoiselle rippled her shoulders. "We are at present much enamoured of *Bethesda*."

That watchfullest showing no alarm, the absurdity of the suspicion smothered it.

Nataly had moreover to receive startling new guests: Lady Rodwell Blachington; Mrs. Fanning, wife of the General: young Mrs. Blathenoy, wife of the great bill-broker: ladies of Wrensham and about. And it was a tasking of her energies equal to the buffetting of recurrent waves on deep sea. The ladies were eager for her entry into Lakelands. She heard that Victor had appointed Lady Blachington's third son to the coveted

post of clerk in the Indian house of Inchling and Radnor. These are the deluge days when even aristocracy will cry blessings on the man who procures a commercial appointment for one of its younger sons offended and rebuffed by the barrier of Examinations for the Civil Service. "To have our Adolphus under Mr. Victor Radnor's protection, is a step!" Lady Blachington said. Nataly was in an atmosphere of hints and revealings. There were City Dinners, to which one or other of the residents about Lakelands had been taken before he sat at Victor's London table. He was already winning his way, apparently without effort, to be the popular man of that neighbourhood. A subterranean tide or a slipping of earth itself seemed bearing her on. She had his promise indeed, that he would not ask of her to enter Lakelands until the day of his freedom had risen; but though she could trust to his word, the heart of the word went out of it when she heard herself thanked by Lady Blachington (who could so well excuse her at such a time of occupation for not returning her call, that

she called in a friendly way a second time, warmly to thank her) for throwing open the Concert room at Lakelands in August, to an Entertainment in assistance of the funds for the purpose of erecting an East of London Clubhouse, where the children of the poor by day could play, and their parents pass a disengaged evening. Doubtless a worthy Charity. Nataly was alive to the duties of wealth. Had it been simply a demand for a donation, she would not have shown that momentary pucker of the brows, which Lady Blachington read as a contrast with the generous vivacity of the husband.

Nataly read a leaf of her fate in this announcement. Nay, she beheld herself as the outer world vexedly beholds a creature swung along to the doing of things against the better mind. An outer world is thoughtless of situations which prepare us to meet the objectionable with a will benumbed;—if we do not, as does that outer world, belong to the party of the readily heroical. She scourged her weakness: and the intimation of the truth stood over her, more than ever

manifest, that the deficiency affecting her character lay in her want of language. A tongue to speak and contend, would have helped her to carve a clearer way. But then again, the tongue to speak must be one which could reproach, and strike at errors; fence, and continually summon resources to engage the electrical vitality of a man like Victor. It was an exultation of their life together, a mark of its holiness for them both, that they had never breathed a reproach upon one another. She dropped away from ideas of remonstrance; faintly seeing, in her sigh of submission, that the deficiency affecting her character would have been supplied by a greater force of character, pressing either to speech or acts. The confession of a fated inevitable in the mind, is weakness prostrate. She knew it: but she could point to the manner of man she was matched with; and it was not a poor excuse.

Mr. Barmby, she thought, deserved her gratitude in some degree for stepping between Mr. Sowerby and Nesta. The girl not having inclinations, and the young gentleman being

devoid of stratagem, they were easily kept from the dangerous count of two.

Mademoiselle would have said, that the shepherd also had rarely if ever a minute quite alone with her lamb. Incredulously she perceived signs of a shock. The secret following the signs was betrayed by Nesta in return for a tender grasp of hands and a droll flutter of eyelids. Out it came, on a nod first; then a dreary mention of a date, and an incident, to bring it nearer to comprehension. Mr. Barmby—and decide who will whether it is that Love was made to elude or that curates impelled by his fires are subtle as æther—had outwitted French watchfulness by stealing minutes enough on a day at Lakelands to declare himself. And no wonder the girl looked so forlorn: he had shivered her mediæval forest-palace of illuminated glass, to leave her standing like a mountain hind, that sniffs the tainted gale off the crag of her first quick leap from hounds; her instincts alarmed, instead of rich imagination colouring and fostering.

She had no memory for his words; so, and

truly, she told her Louise : meaning that she had only a spiceless memory ; especially for the word *love* in her ears from the mouth of a man.

There had been a dream of it ; with the life-awakening marvel it would be, the humbleness it would bring to her soul beneath the golden clothing of her body : one of those faint formless dreams, which are as the bend of grasses to the breath of a still twilight. She lived too spiritedly to hang on any dream ; and had moreover a muffled dread—shadow-sister to the virginal desire—of this one, as of a fateful power that might drag her down, disorder, discolour. But now she had heard it : the word, the very word itself ! in her own ears ! addressed to her ! in a man's voice ! The first utterance had been heard, and it was over ; the chapter of the book of bulky promise of the splendours and mysteries ;—the shimmering woods and bushy glades, and the descent of the shape celestial, and the recognition—the mutual cry of affinity ; and overhead the crimson out-rolling of the flag of beneficent enterprises

hand in hand, all was at an end. These, then, are the deceptions our elders tell of! That masculine voice should herald a new world to the maiden. The voice she had heard did but rock to ruin the world she had been living in.

Mademoiselle prudently forbore from satirical remarks on his person or on his conduct. Nesta had nothing to defend: she walked in a bald waste.

"Can I have been guilty of leading him to think? . . ." she said, in a tone that writhed, at a second discussion of this hapless affair.

"They choose to think," mademoiselle replied. "It is he or another. My dear and dearest, you have entered the field where shots fly thick, as they do to soldiers in battle; and it is neither your fault nor any one's, if you are hit."

Nesta gazed at her, with a shy supplicating cry of "Louise."

Mademoiselle immediately answered the tone of entreaty. "Has it happened to me? I am of the age of eight and twenty; pass-

able, to look at: yes, my dear, I have gone through it. To spare you the questions tormenting you, I will tell you, that perhaps our experience of our feelings comes nigh on a kind of resemblance. The first gentleman who did me the honour to inform me of his passion, was a hunchback."

Nesta cried "Oh!" in a veritable pang of sympathy, and clapped hands to her ears, to shut out Mr. Barmby's boom of the terrific word attacking Louise from that deformed one.

Her disillusionment became of the sort which hears derision. A girl of quick blood and active though unregulated intellect, she caught at the comic of young women's hopes and experiences, in her fear of it.

"My own precious poor dear Louise! what injustice there is in the world for one like my Louise to have a hunchback to be the first! . . ."

"But, my dear, it did me no harm."

"But if it had been known!"

"But it was known!"

Nesta controlled a shuddering: "It is the knowledge of it in ourselves—that it has ever

happened ;—you dear Louise, who deserve so much better ! And one asks—Oh, why are we not left in peace ! And do look at the objects it makes of us ! ” Mademoiselle could see, that the girl’s desperation had got hold of her humour for a life-buoy. “ It is really worse to have it unknown—when you are compelled to be his partner in sharing the secret, and feel as if it were a dreadful doll you conceal for fear that everybody will laugh at its face.”

She resumed her seriousness : “ I find it so hard to be vexed with him and really really like him. For he is a good man ; but he will not let one shake him off. He distresses : because we can’t quite meet as we did. Last Wednesday Concert evening, he kept away ; and I am annoyed that I was glad.”

“ Moths have to pass through showers, and keep their pretty patterns from damage as best they can,” said mademoiselle.

Nesta transformed herself into a disciple of Philosophy on the spot. “ Yes, all these feelings of ours are moth-dust ! One feels them. I suppose they pass. They must.

But tell me, Louise, dear soul, was your poor dear good little afflicted suitor—was he kindly pitied ? ”

“ Conformably with the regulations prescribed to young damsels who are in request to surrender the custody of their hands. It is easy to commit a dangerous excess in the dispensing of that article they call pity of them.”

“ And he—did he?—vowed to you he could not take No for an answer ? ”

At this ingenuous question, woefully uttered, mademoiselle was pricked to smile pointedly. Nesta had a tooth on her underlip. Then, shaking vapours to the winds, she said : “ It is an honour, to be asked ; and we cannot be expected to consent. So I shall wear through it.—Only I do wish that Mr. Fenellan would not call him The Inchcape Bell ! ” She murmured this to herself.

Mr. Barmby was absent for two weeks. “ Can any thing have offended him ? ” Victor inquired, in some consternation, appreciating the man’s worth, and the grand basso he

was; together with the need for him at the Lakelands Concert in August.

Nataly wrote Mr. Barmby a direct invitation. She had no reply. Her speculations were cut short by Victor, who handed her a brief note addressed to him and signed by the Rev. Septimus, petitioning for a private interview.

The formality of the request incensed Victor. "Now, dear love, you see Colney's meaning, when he says, there are *people who have no intimacy in them*. Here's a man who visits me regularly once a week or more, has been familiar for years—four, at least; and he wants to speak to me, and must obtain the 'privilege' by special appointment! What can be the meaning of it?"

"You will hear to-morrow afternoon," Nataly said, seeing one paved way to the meaning—a too likely meaning.

"He hasn't been . . . nothing about Fredi, surely!"

"I have had no information."

"Impossible! Barmby has good sense; Bottesini can't intend to come scraping on

that string. But we won't lose him; he's one of us. Barmby counts for more at a Charity Concert than all the catalogue, and particularly in the country. But he's an excellent fellow—eh?"

"That he is," Nataly agreed.

Victor despatched a cheerful curt consent to see Mr. Barmby privately on the late afternoon of the day to follow.

Nesta, returning home from the park at that hour of the interview, ignorant of Mr. Barmby's purpose though she was, had her fires extinguished by the rolling roar of curfew along the hall-passage, out of the library.

. . .

CHAPTER III.

SUITORS FOR THE HAND OF NESTA VICTORIA.

WHEN, upon the well-known quest, the delightful singer Orpheus took that downward way, coming in sight of old Cerberus centiceps, he astutely feigned inattention to the hostile appearances of the multiple beast, and with a wave of his plectrum over the responsive lyre, he at the stroke raised voice. This much you know. It may be communicated to you, that there was then beheld the most singular spectacle ever exhibited on the dizzy line of division between the living and the dead. For those unaccustomed musical tones in the last thin whiff of our sustaining air were so smartingly persuasive as to pierce to the vitals of the faithful Old Dog before his offended sentiments had leisure

to rouse their heads against a beggar of a mortal. The terrible sugariness which poured into him worked like venom to cause an encounter and a wrestling: his battery of jaws expressed it. They gaped. At the same time, his eyeballs gave up. All the Dog, that would have barked the breathing intruder an hundredfold back to earth, was one compulsory centurion yawn. Tears, issue of the frightful internal wedding of the dulcet and the sour (a ravishing rather of the latter by the former), rolled off his muzzles.

Now, if you are not for insisting that a magnificent simile shall be composed of exactly the like notes in another octave, you will catch the fine flavour of analogy and be wafted in a beat of wings across the scene of the application of the Rev. Septimus Barmby to Mr. Victor Radnor, that he might enter the house in the guise of suitor for the hand of Nesta Victoria. It is the excellling merit of similes and metaphors to spring us to vault over gaps and thickets and dreary places. But, as with the visits of Immortals, we must be ready to receive

them. Beware, moreover, of examining them too scrupulously: they have a trick of wearing to vapour if closely scanned. Let it be gratefully for their aid.

So far the comparison is absolute, that Mr. Barmby *passed*: he was at liberty to pursue his quest.

Victor could not explain how he had been brought to grant it. He was at pains to conceal the bewilderment Mr. Barmby had cast on him, and make Nataly see the smallness of the grant:—both of them were unwilling to lose Barmby; there was not the slightest fear about Fredi, he said; and why should not poor Barmby have his chance with the others in the race!—and his Nataly knew that he hated to speak unkindly: he could cry the negative like a crack of thunder in the City. But such matters as these! and a man pleading merely for the right to see the girl!—and pleading in a tone . . . “I assure you, my love, he touched chords.”

“Did he allude to advantages in the alliance with him?” Nataly asked smoothly.

“His passion — nothing else. Candid

enough. And he had a tone—he *has* a tone, you know. It's not what he said. Some allusion to belief in a favourable opinion of him . . . encouragement . . . on the part of the mama. She would have him travelling with us ! I foresaw it."

" You were astonished when it came."

" We always are."

Victor taunted her softly with having encouraged Mr. Barmby.

She had thought in her heart — not seriously ; on a sigh of despondency—that Mr. Barmby espousing the girl would smoothe a troubled prospect : and a present resentment at her weakness rendered her shrewd to detect Victor's cunning to cover his own : a thing imaginable of him previously in sentimental matters, yet never accurately and so legibly printed on her mind. It did not draw her to read him with a novel familiarity ; it drew her to be more sensible of foregone intimations of the man he was—irresistible in attack, not impregnably defensive. Nor did he seem in this instance humanely considerate : if mademoiselle's estimate of the

mind of the girl was not wrong, then Mr. Barmby's position would be both a ridiculous and a cruel one. She had some silly final idea that the poor man might now serve permanently to check the more dreaded applicant: a proof that her ordinary reflectiveness was blunted.

Nataly acknowledged, after rallying Victor for coming to have his weakness condoned, a justice in his counter-accusation, of a loss of her natural cheerfulness, and promised amendment, with a steely smile, that his lips mimicked fondly; and her smile softened. To strengthen the dear soul's hopes, he spoke, as one who had received the latest information, of Dr. Themison and surgeons;—little conscious of the tragic depths he struck or of the burden he gave her heart to bear. Her look alarmed him. She seemed to be hugging herself up to the tingling scalp, and was in a moment marble to sight and touch. She looked like the old engravings of martyrs taking the bite of the jaws of flame at the stake.

He held her embraced, feeling her body as

if it were in the awful grip of fingers from the outside of life.

The seizure was over before it could be called ominous. When it was once over, and she had smiled again and rebuked him for excessive anxiety, his apprehensions no longer troubled him, but subsided sensationally in wrath at the crippled woman who would not obey the dictate of her ailments instantly to perish and spare this dear one annoyance.

Subsequently, later than usual, he performed his usual mental penance for it. In consequence, the wrath, and the wish, and the penitence, haunted him, each swelling to possession of him in turn; until they united to head a plunge into retrospects; which led to his reviewing the army of charges against Mrs. Burman.

And of this he grew ashamed, attributing it to the morbid indulgence in reflection: a disease never afflicting him anterior to the stupid fall on London Bridge. He rubbed instinctively for the punctilio-bump, and could cheat his fancy to think a remainder of it there, just below, half an inch to the right

of, the spot where a phrenologist, invited by Nataly in old days, had marked philo-progenitiveness on his capacious and enviable cerebrum. He knew well it was a fancy. But it was a fact also, that since the day of the fall (never, save in merest glimpses, before that day), he had taken to look behind him, as though an eye had been knocked in the back of his head.

Then, was that day of the announcement of Lakelands to Nataly, to be accounted a gloomy day? He would not have it so.

She was happily occupied with her purchases of furniture, Fredi with her singing lessons, and he with his business; a grasp of many ribands, reining-in or letting loose; always enjoyable in the act. Recently only had he known when at home, a relaxation, a positive pleasure in looking forward to the hours of the City office. This was odd, but so it was; and looking homeward from the City, he had a sense of disappointment when it was not Concert evening. The Cormyns, the Yatts, and Priscilla Graves, and Pempton, foolish fellow, and that bothering Barmby,

and Peridon and Catkin, were the lining of his nest. Well, and so they had been before Lakelands rose. What had induced! . . . he suddenly felt foreign to himself. The shrouded figure of his lost Idea on London Bridge went by.

A peep into the folds of the shroud was granted him:—Is it a truth, that if we are great owners of money, we are so swoln with a force not native to us, as to be precipitated into acts the downright contrary of our tastes?

He inquired it of his tastes, which have the bad habit of unmeasured phrasing when they are displeased, and so they yield no rational answer. Still he gave heed to violent extraneous harpings against money. Epigrams of Colney's; abuse of it and the owners of it by Socialist orators reported in some newspaper corner; had him by the ears.

They ceased in the presence of Lady Grace Halley, who entered his office to tell him she was leaving town for Whinfold, her husband's family-seat, where the dear man lay in evil case. She signified her resignation to the decrees from above, saying generously:

“ You look troubled, my friend. Any bad City news ? ”

“ I look troubled ? ” Victor said laughing, and bethought him of what the trouble might be. “ City news would not cause the look. Ah, yes :—I was talking in the street to a friend of mine on horseback the other day, and he kept noticing his horse’s queer starts. We spied half a dozen children in the gutter, at the tail of the horse, one of them plucking at a hair. “ Please, sir, may I have a hair out of your horse’s tail ? ’ said the mite. We patted the poor horse that grew a tail for urchins to pluck at. Men come to the fathers about their girls. It’s my belief that mothers more easily say no. If they learn the word as maids, you’ll say ! However, there’s no fear about my girl. Fredi’s hard to snare. And what brings you Cityward ? ”

“ I want to know whether I shall do right in selling out of the Tiddler mine.”

“ You have multiplied your investment by ten.”

“ If it had been thousands ! ”

“ Clearly, you sell ; always jump out of a

mounted mine, unless you're at the bottom of it."

"There are City-articles against the mine this morning—or I should have been on my way to Whinfold at this moment. The shares are lower."

"The merry boys are at work to bring your balloon to the ground, that you may quit it for them to ascend. Tiddler has enemies, like the best of mines: or they may be named lovers, if you like. And mines that have gone up, go down for a while before they rise again; it's an affair of undulations; rocket mines are not so healthy. The stories are false, for the time. I had the latest from Dartrey Fenellan yesterday. He's here next month, some time in August."

"He is married, is he not?"

"Was."

Victor's brevity sounded oddly to Lady Grace.

"Is he not a soldier?" she said.

"Soldiers and parsons!" Victor interjected.

Now she saw. She understood the portent

of Mr. Barmby's hovering offer of the choice of songs, and the recent tremulousness of the welling *Bethesda*.

But she had come about her own business ; and after remarking, that when there is a prize there must be competition, or England will have to lower her flag, she declared her resolve to stick to Tiddler, exclaiming : " It's only in mines that twenty times the stake is not a dream of the past ! "

" The Riviera green field on the rock is always open to you," said Victor.

She put out her hand to be taken. " Not if you back me here. It really is not gambling when yours is the counsel I follow. And if I'm to be a widow, I shall have to lean on a friend, gifted like you. I love adventure, danger ;—well, if we two are in it ; just to see my captain in a storm. And if the worst happens, we go down together. It's the detestation of our deadly humdrum of modern life ; some inherited love of fighting."

" Say, brandy."

" Does not Mr. Durance accuse you of an addiction to the brandy novel ? "

“Colney may call it what he pleases: If I read fiction, let it be fiction; airier than hard fact. If I see a ballet, my troop of short skirts must not go stepping like pavement policemen. I can’t read dull analytical stuff or ‘stylists’ when I want action—if I’m to give my mind to a story. I can supply the reflections. I’m English—if Colney’s right in saying we always come round to the story with the streak of supernaturalism. I don’t ask for bloodshed: that’s what his ‘brandy’ means.”

“But Mr. Durance is right, we require a shedding; I confess I expect it where there’s love; it’s part of the balance, and justifies one’s excitement. How otherwise do you get any real crisis? I must read and live something unlike this flat life around us.”

“There’s the Adam life and the Macadam life, Fenellan says. Pass it in books, but in life we can have quite enough excitement coming out of our thoughts. No brandy there! And no fine name for personal predilections or things done in domino!” Victor said, with his very pleasant face, pressing her hand, to keep the act of long holding it

in countenance and bring it to a well-punctuated conclusion : thinking involuntarily of the other fair woman, whose hand was his, and who betrayed a beaten visage despite—or with that poor kind of—trust in her captain. But the thought was not guilty of drawing comparisons. “This is one that I could trust, as captain or mate,” he pressed the hand again before dropping it.

“You judge entirely by the surface if you take me for a shifty person at the trial,” said Lady Grace.

Skepsey entered the room with one of his packets, and she was reminded of trains and husbands.

She left Victor uncomfortably ruffled : and how ? for she had none of the physical charms appealing peculiarly to the man who was taken with grandeur of shape. She belonged rather to the description physically distasteful to him.

It is a critical comment on a civilization carelessly distilled from the jealous East, when visits of fair women to City offices can have this effect. If the sexes are separated

for an hour, the place where one is excluded or not common to see, becomes inflammable to that appearing spark. *He* does outrage to a *bona Dea*: *she* to the monasticism of the Court of Law: and he and she awaken unhallowed emotions. Supposing, however, that western men were to de-orientalize their gleeful notions of her, and dis-Turk themselves by inviting the woman's voluble tongue to sisterly occupation there in the midst of the pleading Court, as in the domestic circle: very soon would her eyes be harmless:—unless directed upon us with intent.

That is the burning core of the great Question, our Armageddon in Morality: Is she moral? Does she mean to be harmless? Is she not untamable Old Nature? And when once on an equal footing with her lordly half, would not the spangled beauty, in a turn, like the realistic transformation-trick of a pantomime, show herself to be that wanton old thing—the empress of disorderliness? You have to recollect, as the Conservative acutely suggests, that her timidities,

at present urging her to support Establishments, pertain to her state of dependence. The party views of Conservatism are, must be, founded, we should remember, on an intimate acquaintance with her in the situations where she is almost unrestrictedly free and her laughter rings to confirm the sentences of classical authors and Eastern sages. Conservatives know what they are about when they refuse to fling the last lattice of an ancient harem open to air and sun—the brutal dispersers of mystery, which would despoil an ankle of its flying wink.

Victor's opinions were those of the entrenched majority; objecting to the occult power of women, as we have the women now, while legislating to maintain them so; and forbidding a step to a desperately wicked female world lest the step should be to wickeder. His opinions were in the background, rarely stirred; but the lady had brought them forward; and he fretted at his restlessness, vexed that it should be due to the intrusion of the sex instead of to the charms of the individual. No sting of the

sort had bothered him, he called to mind, on board the Channel boat—nothing to speak of. “Why does she come here! Why didn’t she go to her husband! She gets into the City scramble blindfold, and catches at the nearest hand to help her out! Nice woman enough.” Yes, but he was annoyed with her for springing sensations that ran altogether heartless to the object, at the same time that they were disloyal to the dear woman their natural divinity. And between him and that dear woman, since the communication made by Skepsey in the town of Dreux, nightly the dividing spirit of Mrs. Burman lay: cold as a corpse. They both felt her there. They kissed coldly, pressed a hand, said good night.

Next afternoon the announcement by Skepsey of the Hon. Dudley Sowerby, surprised Victor’s eyebrows at least, and caused him genially to review the visit of Lady Grace.

Whether or not Colney Durance drew his description of a sunken nobility from the “sick falcon” distinguishing the handsome

features of Mr. Sowerby, that beaked invalid was particularly noticeable to Victor during the statement of his case, although the young gentleman was far from being one, in Colney's words, to enliven the condition of domestic fowl with an hereditary turn for "preying;" eminently the reverse; he was of good moral repute, a worker, a commendable citizen. But there was the obligation upon him to speak—it is expected in such cases, if only as a formality—of his "love:" hard to do even in view and near to the damsel's reddening cheeks: it perplexed him. He dropped a veil on the bashful topic; his tone was the same as when he reverted to the material points; his present income, his position in the great Bank of Shotts & Co., his prospects, the health of the heir to the Cantor earldom. He considered that he spoke to a member of the City merchants, whose preference for the plain positive, upon the question of an alliance between families by marriage, lends them for once a resemblance to lords. When a person is not read by character, the position or profession is

called on to supply raised print for the finger-ends to spell.

Hard on poor Fredi ! was Victor's thought behind the smile he bent on this bald Cupid. She deserved a more poetical lover ! His paternal sympathies for the girl besought in love, revived his past feelings as a wooer ; nothing but a dread of the influence of Mr. Barmby's toned eloquence upon the girl, after her listening to Dudley Sowerby's addresses, checked his contempt for the latter. He could not despise the suitor he sided with against another and seemingly now a more dangerous. Unable quite to repress the sentiment, he proceeded immediately to put it to his uses. For we have no need to be scrupulously formal and precise in the exposition of circumstances to a fellow who may thank the stars if such a girl condescends to give him a hearing. He had this idea through the conception of his girl's generosity. And furthermore, the cognizant eye of a Lucretian Alma Mater having seat so strongly in Victor, demanded as a right an effusion of the promising amorous graces on the part

of the acceptable applicant to the post of husband of that peerless. These being absent, evidently non-existent, it seemed sufficient for the present, after the fashion of the young gentleman, to capitulate the few material matters briefly.

They were dotted along with a fine disregard of the stateliness of the sum to be settled on Nesta Victoria, and with a distant but burning wish all the while, that the suitor had been one to touch his heart and open it, inspiring it—as could have been done—to disclose for good and all the things utterable. Victor loved clear honesty, as he loved light : and though he hated to be accused of not showing a clean face in the light, he would have been moved and lifted to confess to a spot by the touch at his heart. Dudley Sowerby's deficiencies, however, were outweighed by the palpable advantages of his birth, his prospects, and his good reputation for conduct ; add thereto his gentlemanly manners. Victor sighed again over his poor Fredi ; and in telling Mr. Sowerby that the choice must be left to her, he had the regrets

of a man aware of his persuasive arts and how they would be used, to think that he was actually making the choice.

Observe how fatefully he who has a scheme is the engine of it; he is no longer the man of his tastes or of his principles; he is on a line of rails for a terminus; and he may cast languishing eyes across waysides to right and left, he has doomed himself to proceed, with a self-devouring hunger for the half desired; probably manhood gone at the embrace of it. This may be or not, but Nature has decreed to him the forfeit of pleasure. She bids us count the passage of a sober day for the service of the morrow; that is her system; and she would have us adopt it, to keep in us the keen edge for cutting, which is the guarantee of enjoyment: doing otherwise, we lose ourselves in one or other of the furious matrix instincts; we are blunt to all else.

Young Dudley fully agreed that the choice must be with Miss Radnor; he alluded to her virtues, her accomplishments. He was waxing to fervidness. He said he must

expect competitors; adding, on a start, that he was to say, from his mother, she, in the case of an intention to present Miss Radnor at Court. . . .

Victor waved hand for a finish, looking as though his head had come out of hot water. He sacrificed Royalty to his necessities, under a kind of sneer at its functions: "Court! my girl? But the arduous duties are over for the season. We are a democratic people retaining the seductions of monarchy, as a friend says; and of course a girl may like to count among the flowers of the kingdom for a day, in the list of Court presentations; no harm. Only there's plenty of time . . . very young girls have their heads turned—though I don't say, don't imagine, my girl would. By and by perhaps."

Dudley was ushered into Mr. Inchling's room and introduced to the figure-head of the Firm of Inchling, Pennergate, and Radnor: a respectable City merchant indeed, whom Dudley could read-off in a glimpse of the downright contrast to his partner. He had heard casual remarks on the respectable City

of London merchant from Colney Durance. A short analytical gaze at him, helped to an estimate of the powers of the man who kept him up. Mr. Inchling was a florid City-feaster, descendant of a line of City merchants, having features for a wife to identify; as drovers, they tell us, can single one from another of their round-bellied beasts. Formerly the leader of the Firm, he was now, after dreary fits of restiveness, kickings, false prophecies of ruin, Victor's obedient cart-horse. He sighed in set terms for the old days of the Firm, when, like trouts in the current, the Firm had only to gape for shoals of good things to fatten it: a tale of English prosperity in quiescence; narrated interjectorily among the by-ways of the City, and wanting only metre to make it our national Poem. Mr. Inchling did not deny that grand mangers of golden oats were still somehow constantly allotted to him. His wife believed in Victor, and deemed the loss of the balancing Pennergate a gain. Since that lamentable loss, Mr. Inchling, under the irony of circumstances the Tory of Commerce, had

trotted and galloped whither driven, racing like mad against his will and the rival nations now in the field to force the pace; a name for enterprise; the close commercial connection of a man who speculated—who, to put it plainly, lived on his wits; hurried onward and onward; always doubting, munching, grumbling at satisfaction, in perplexity of the gratitude which is apprehensive of black Nemesis at a turn of the road, to confound so wild a whip as Victor Radnor. He had never forgiven the youth's venture in India of an enormous purchase of Cotton many years back, and which he had repudiated, though not his share of the hundreds of thousands realized before the refusal to ratify the bargain had come to Victor. Mr. Inclining dated his first indigestion from that disquieting period. He assented to the praise of Victor's genius, admitting benefits; his heart refused to pardon, and consequently his head wholly to trust, the man who robbed him of his quondam comfortable feeling of security. And if you will imagine the sprite of the aggregate English Taxpayer personifying

Steam as the malignant who has despoiled him of the blessed Safety-Assurance he once had from his God Neptune against invaders, you will comprehend the state of Mr. Inchling's mind in regard to his terrific and bountiful, but very disturbing partner. He thanked heaven to his wife often, that he had nothing to do with North American or South American mines and pastures or with South Africa and gold and diamonds: and a wife must sometimes listen, mastering her inward comparisons. Dr. Schlesien had met and meditated on this example of the island energy. Mr. Inchling was not permitted by his wife to be much the guest of the Radnor household, because of the frequent meeting there with Colney Durance; Colney's humour for satire being instantly in bristle at sight of his representative of English City merchants: "over whom," as he wrote of the venerable body, "the disciplined and instructed Germans not deviously march; whom acute and adventurous Americans, with half a cock of the eye in passing, compassionately outstrip." He and Dr. Schlesien

agreed upon Mr. Inchling. Meantime the latter gentleman did his part at the tables of the wealthier City Companies, and retained his appearance of health ; he was beginning to think, upon a calculation of the increased treasures of those Companies and the country, that we, the Taxpayer, ought not to leave it altogether to Providence to defend them ; notwithstanding the watchful care of us hitherto shown by our briny Providence, to save us from anxiety and expense. But there are, he said, "difficulties ;" and the very word could stop him, as commonly when our difficulty lies in the exercise of thinking.

Victor's African room, containing large wall-maps of auriferous regions, was inspected ; and another, where clerks were busy over miscellaneous Continents. Dudley Sowerby hoped he might win the maiden.

He and Victor walked in company Westward. The shop of Boyle and Luckwort, chemists, was not passed on this occasion. Dudley grieved that he had to be absent from the next Concert for practise, owing to his engagement to his mother to go down to

the family seat near Tunbridge Wells. Victor mentioned his relatives, the Duvidney maiden ladies, residing near the Wells. They measured the distance between Cronidge and Moorsedge, the two houses, as for half an hour on horseback.

Nesta told her father at home that the pair of them had been observed confidentially arm in arm, and conversing so profoundly.

“Who, do you think, was the topic?” Victor asked.

She would not chase the little blue butterfly of a guess.

CHAPTER IV.

TREATS OF NATURE AND CIRCUMSTANCE AND
THE DISSENSION BETWEEN THEM AND OF A
SATIRIST'S! MALIGNITY IN THE DIRECTION
OF HIS COUNTRY.

THERE is at times in the hearts of all men of active life a vivid wild moment or two of dramatic dialogue between the veteran antagonists, Nature and Circumstance, when they, whose business it should be to be joyfully one, furiously split; and the Dame is up with her shrillest querulousness to inquire of her offspring, for the distinct original motive of his conduct. Why did he bring her to such a pass! And what is the gain? If he be not an alienated issue of the great Mother, he will strongly incline to her view, that he put himself into har-

ness to join with a machine going the dead contrary way of her welfare; and thereby wrote himself donkey, for his present reading. Soldiers, heroes, even the braided, even the wearers of the gay cock's feathers, who get the honours and the pocket-pieces, know the moment of her electrical eloquence. They have no answer for her, save an index at the machine pushing them on yet farther under the enemy's line of fire, where they pluck the golden wreath or the livid, and in either case listen no more. They glorify her topping wisdom while on the march to confound it. She is wise in her way. But it is asked by the disputant, If we had followed her exclusively, how far should we have travelled from our starting-point? We of the world and its prizes and duties must do her an injury to make her tongue musical to us, and her argument worthy of attention. So it seems. How to keep the proper balance between those two testy old wranglers, that rarely pull the right way together, is as much the task for men in the grip of the world, as for the wanton youthful fry

under dominion of their instincts; and probably, when it is done, man will have attained the golden age of his retirement from service.

Why be scheming? Victor asked. Unlike the gallant soldiery, his question was raised in the blush of a success, from an examination of the quality of the thing won; although it had not changed since it was first coveted; it was demonstrably the same: and an astonishing dry stick he held, as a reward for perpetual agitations and perversions of his natural tastes. Here was a Dudley Sowerby, the direct issue of the conception of Lake-lands; if indeed they were not conceived together in one; and the young gentleman had moral character, good citizen substance, and station, rank, prospect of a title; and the grasp of him was firm. Yet so far was it from hearty, that when hearing a professed satirist like Colney Durance remark on the decorous manner of Dudley's transparent courtship of the girl, under his look of an awakened approval of himself, that he appeared to be asking everybody:—Do you

not think I bid fair for an excellent father of Philistines?—Victor had a nip of spite at the thought of Dudley's dragging him bodily to be the grandfather. Poor Fredi, too!—necessarily the mother: condemned by her hard fate to feel proud of Philistine babies! Though women soon get reconciled to it! Or do they? They did once. What if his Fredi turned out one of the modern young women, who have drunk of ideas? He caught himself speculating on that, as on a danger. The alliance with Dudley really seemed to set him facing backward.

Colney might not have been under prompting of Nataly when he derided Dudley; but Victor was at war with the picture of her, in her compression of a cruel laugh, while her eyelids were hard shut, as if to exclude the young patriarch of Philistines' ridiculous image.

He hearkened to the Nature interrogating him, why had he stepped on a path to put division between himself and his beloved?—the smallest of gaps; and still the very smallest between nuptial lovers is a division

—and that may become a mortal wound to their one life. Why had he roused a slumbering world? Glimpses of the world's nurse-like, old-fashioned, mother-nightcap benevolence to its kicking favourites; its long-suffering tolerance for the heroic breakers of its rough cast laws, while the decent curtain continues dropped, or lifted only ankle-high; together with many scenes, lively suggestions, of the choice of ways he liked best, told of things, which were better things, incomprehensibly forfeited. So that the plain sense of value insisted on more than one weighing of the gain in hand: a dubious measure.

He was as little disposed to reject it as to stop his course at a goal of his aim. Nevertheless, a gain thus poorly estimated, could not command him to do a deed of humiliation on account of it. The speaking to this dry young Dudley was not imperative at present. A word would do in the day to come.

Nataly was busy with her purchases of furniture, and the practise for the great

August Concert. He dealt her liberal encouragements, up to the verge of Dr. Themison's latest hummed words touching Mrs. Burman, from which he jumped in alarm lest he should paralyze her again: the dear soul's dreaded aspect of an earthly pallor was a spectre behind her cheeks, ready to rush forth. Fenellan brought Carling to dine with him; and Themison was confirmed by Carling, with incidents in proof; Carling by Jarniman, also with incidents; one very odd one—or so it seemed, in the fury of the first savour of it:—she informed Jarniman, Skepsey said his friend Jarniman said, that she had dreamed of making her appearance to him on the night of the 23rd August, and of setting the date on the calendar over his desk, when she entered his room: “Sitting-room, not bed-room; she was always quite the lady,” Skepsey reported his Jarniman. Mrs. Burman, as a ghost, would respect herself; she would keep to her character. Jarniman quite expected the dream to be verified; she was a woman of her word: he believed she had received a revelation of the ap-

proaching fact: he was preparing for the scene.

Victor had to keep silent and discourse of general prosperity. His happy vivaciousness assisted him to feel it by day. Nataly heard him at night, on a moan: "Poor soul!" and loudly once while performing an abrupt demi-vault from back to side: "Perhaps now!" in a voice through doors. She schooled herself to breathe equably.

Not being allowed to impart the distressing dose of comfort he was charged with, he swallowed it himself; and these were the consequences. And an uneasy sleep was traditionally a matter for grave debate in the Radnor family. The Duvidney ladies, Dorothea and Virginia, would have cited ancestral names, showing it to be the worst of intimations. At night, lying on his back beneath a weight of darkness, one heavily craped figure, distinguishable through the gloom, as a blot on a black pad, accused the answering darkness within him, until his mind was dragged to go through the whole case by morning light; and the compas-

sionate man appealed to common sense, to stamp and pass his delectable sophistries; as, that it was his intense humaneness, which exposed him to an accusation of inhumanity; his prayer for the truly best to happen, which anticipated Mrs. Burman's expiry. They were simple sophistries, fabricated to suit his needs, readily taking and bearing the imprimatur of common sense. They refreshed him, as a chemical scent a crowded room.

All because he could not open his breast to Nataly, by reason of her feebleness; or feel enthusiasm in the possession of young Dudley! A dry stick indeed beside him on the walk Westward. Good quality wood, no doubt, but dry, varnished for conventional uses. Poor dear Fredi would have to crown it like the May-day posy of the urchins of Craye Farm and Creckholt!

Dudley wished the great City-merchant to appreciate him as a diligent student of commercial matters: rivalries of Banks; Foreign and Municipal Loans, American Rails, and Argentine; new Companies of

wholesome appearance or sinister ; or starting with a dram in the stomach, or born to bleat prostrate, like sheep on their backs in a ditch ; Trusts and Founders ; Breweries bursting vats upon the markets, and England prone along the gutters, gobbling, drunk for shares, and sober in the possession of certain of them. But when, as Colney says, a grateful England has conferred the Lordship on her Brewer, he gratefully hands-over the establishment to his country ; and both may disregard the howls of a Salvation Army of shareholders.—Beaten by the Germans in Brewery, too ! Dr. Schlesien has his right to crow. We were ahead of them, and they came and studied us, and they studied Chemistry as well ; while we went on down our happy-go-lucky old road ; and then had to hire their young Professors, and then to import their beer. *Have* the Germans more brains than we English ? Victor's blood up to the dome of his cranium knocked the patriotic negative. But, as old Colney says (and bother him, for constantly intruding !), the comfortably successful have the *habit* of

sitting, and that dulls the brain yet more than it eases the person : hence are we out-paced ; we have now to know we are racing. Victor scored a mark for one of his projects. A well-conducted Journal of the sharpest pens in the land might, at a sacrifice of money grandly sunk, expose to his English how and to what degree their sports, and their fierce feastings, and their opposition to ideas, and their timidity in regard to change, and their execration of criticism applied to themselves, and their unanimous adoption of it for a weapon against others, are signs of a prolonged indulgence in the cushioned seat. Victor saw it. But would the people he loved ? He agreed with Colney, forgetting the satirist's venom : to-wit, that the journalists should be close under their editor's rod to put it in sound bold English ;—no metaphors, no similes, nor flowery insubstantiality ; but honest Saxon manger stuff : and put it repeatedly, in contempt of the disgust of iteration ; hammering so a soft place on the Anglican skull, which is rubbed in consequence, and taught at last through sore-

ness to reflect.—A Journal?—with Colney Durance for Editor?—and called conformably THE WHIPPING-TOP? Why not, if it exactly hits the signification of the Journal and that which it would have the country do to itself, to keep it going and truly topping? For there is no vulgarity in a title strongly signifying the intent. Victor wrote it at night, naming Colney for Editor, with a sum of his money to be devoted to the publication, in a form of memorandum; and threw it among the papers in his desk.

Young Dudley had a funny inquisitiveness about Dartrey Fenellan; owing to Fredi's reproduction or imitation of her mother's romantic sentiment for Dartrey, doubtless: a bit of jealousy, indicating that the dry fellow had his feelings. Victor touched-off an outline of Dartrey's history and character:—the half-brother of Simeon, considerably younger, and totally different. "Dartrey's mother was Lady Charlotte Kiltorne, one of the Clanconans; better mother than wife, perhaps; and no reproach on her, not a shadow; only she made the General's

Bank-notes fly black paper. And—if you're for heredity—the queer point is, that Simeon, whose mother was a sober-minded woman, has always been the spendthrift. Dartrey married one of the Hennen women, all an odd lot, all handsome. I met her once. Colney said, she came up here with a special commission from the Prince of Darkness. There are women who stir the unholy in men—whether they mean it or not, you know.”

Dudley pursed to remark, that he could not say he did know. And good for Fredi if he did not know, and had his objections to the knowledge! But he was like the men who escape colds by wrapping in comforters instead of trusting to the spin of the blood.

“She played poor Dartrey pranks before he buried—he behaved well to her; and that says much for him; he has a devil of a temper. I've seen the blood in his veins mount to cracking. But there's the man: because she was a woman, he never let it break out with her. And, by heaven, he had cause. She couldn't be left. She tricked

him, and she loved him—passionately, I believe. You don't understand women loving the husband they drag through the mire?"

Dudley did not. He sharpened his mouth to the sour mute negative.

"Buried, you said, sir?—a widower?"

"I've no positive information; we shall hear when he comes back," Victor replied hurriedly. "He got a drenching of all the damns in the British service from his Generalissimo one day at a Review, for a trooper's negligence—button or stock missing, or something; and off goes Dartrey to his hut, and breaks his sword, and sends in his resignation. Good soldier lost. And I can't complain; he has been a right-hand man to me over in Africa. But a man ought to have some control of his temper, especially a soldier."

Dudley put emphasis into his acquiescence.

"Worse than that temper of Dartrey's, he can't forgive an injury. He bears a grudge against his country. You've heard Colney Durance abuse old England. It's three parts factitious—literary exercise. It's

milk beside the contempt of Dartrey's shrug. He thinks we're a dead people, if a people; 'subsisting on our fat,' as Colney says."

"I am not of opinion that we show it," observed Dudley.

"We don't," Victor agreed. He dis-relished his companion's mincing tone of a monumental security, and yearned for Dartrey or Simeon or Colney to be at his elbow rather than this most commendable of orderly citizens, who little imagined the treacherous revolt from him in the bosom of the gentleman cordially signifying full agreement. But Dudley was not gifted to read behind words and looks.

They were in the Park of the dwindling press of carriages, and here was this young Dudley saying, quite commendably: "It's a pity we seem to have no means of keeping our parks select."

Victor flung Simeon Fenellan at him in thought. He remembered a fable of Fenellan's, about a Society of the Blest, and the salt it was to them to discover an intruder

from below, and the consequent accelerated measure in their hymning.

“Have you seen anything offensive to you?” he asked.

“One sees notorious persons.”

Dudley spoke aloof from them—“out of his cold attics,” Fenellan would have said.

Victor approved: with the deadened feeling common to us when first in sad earnest we consent to take life as it is. He perceived, too, the comicality of his having to resign himself to the fatherly embrace of goodness.

Lakelands had him fast, and this young Dudley was the kernel of Lakelands. If he had only been intellectually a little flexible in his morality! But no; he wore it cap à pie, like a mediæval knight his armour. One had to approve. And there was no getting away from him. He was good enough to stay in town for the practise of the opening overture of the amateurs, and the flute-duet, when his family were looking for him at Tunbridge Wells; and almost every day Victor was waylaid by him at a corner of the Strand.

Occasionally, Victor appeared at the point of interception armed with Colney Durance, for whom he had called in the Temple, bent on self-defence, although Colney was often as bitter to his taste as to Dudley's. Latterly the bitter had become a tonic. We rejoice in the presence of goodness, let us hope; and still an impersonation of conventional goodness perpetually about us depresses. Dudley drove him to Colney for relief. Besides it pleased Nataly, that he should be bringing Colney home; it looked to her as if he were subjecting Dudley to critical inspection before he decided a certain question much, and foolishly, dreaded by the dear soul. That quieted her. And another thing, she liked him to be with Colney, for a clog on him; as it were, a tuning-fork for the wild airs he started. A little pessimism, also, she seemed to like; probably as an appeasement after hearing, and having to share, high flights. And she was, in her queer woman's way, always reassured by his endurance of Colney's company:—she read it to mean, that he could bear Colney's perusal of him.

and satiric stings. Victor had seen these petty matters among the various which were made to serve his double and treble purposes; now, thanks to the operation of young Dudley within him, he felt them. Preferring Fenellan's easy humour to Colney's acid, he was nevertheless braced by the latter's antidote to Dudley, while reserving his entire opposition in the abstract.

For Victor Radnor and Colney Durance were the Optimist and Pessimist of their society. They might have headed those tribes in the country. At a period when the omnibus of the world appears to its quaint occupants to be going faster, men are shaken into the acceptation, if not performance, of one part or the other as it is dictated to them by their temperaments. Compose the parts, and you come nigh to the meaning of the Nineteenth Century: the mother of these gosling affirmatives and negatives divorced from harmony and awakened by the slight increase of incubating motion to vitality. Victor and Colney had been champion duellists for the rosy and the saturnine since the former

cheerfully slaved for a small stipend in the City of his affection, and the latter entered on an inheritance counted in niggard hundreds, that withdrew a briefless barrister disposed for scholarship from the forlornest of seats in the Courts. They had foretold of one another each the unfulfilled; each claimed the actual as the child of his prediction. Victor was to have been ruined long back; Colney the prey of independent bachelors. Colney had escaped his harpy, and Victor could be called a millionaire and more. Prophecy was crowned by Colney's dyspepsia, by Victor's ticklish domestic position. Their pity for one another, their warm regard, was genuine; only, they were of different temperaments; and we have to distinguish, that in many estimable and some gifted human creatures, it is the quality of the blood which directs the current of opinion.

Victor played-off Colney upon Dudley, for his internal satisfaction, and to lull Nataly and make her laugh; but he could not, as she hoped he was doing, take Colney into his confidence; inasmuch as the Optimist, im-

pelled by his exuberant anticipatory trustfulness, is an author, and does things; whereas the Pessimist is your chaired critic, with the delivery of a censor, generally an undoer of things. Our Optimy has his instinct to tell him of the cast of Pessimy's countenance at the confession of a dilemma—foreseen! He hands himself to Pessimy, as it were a sugar-cane, for the sour brute to suck the sugar and whack with the wood.—No, he cannot do it; he gets no compensation: Pessimy is invulnerable. You waste your time in hurling a common *tu-quoque* at one who hugs the worst.

The three walking in the park, with their bright view, and black view, and neutral view of life, were a comical trio. They had come upon the days of the unfanned electric furnace, proper to London's early August when it is not pipeing March. Victor complacently bore heat as well as cold: but young Dudley was a drought, and Colney a drug to refresh it; and why was he stewing in London? It was for this young Dudley, who resembled a London of the sparrowy

roadways and wearisome pavements and blocks of fortress mansions, by chance a water-cart spirting a stale water: or a London of the farewell dinner-parties, where London's professed anecdotist lays the dust with his ten times told. Why was not Nataly relieved of her dreary round of the purchases of furniture! They ought all now to be in Switzerland or Tyrol. Nesta had of late been turning over leaves of an Illustrated book of Tyrol, dear to her after a run through the Innthal to the Dolomites one splendid August; and she and Nataly had read there of Hofer, Speckbacher, Haspinger; and wrath had filled them at the meanness of the Corsican, who posed after it as victim on St. Helena's rock; the scene in grey dawn on Mantua's fortress-walls blasting him in the Courts of History, when he strikes for his pathetic sublime. Victor remembered how he had been rhetorical, as the mouth-piece of his darlings. But he had in memory prominently now the many glorious pictures of that mountain-land beckoning to him, waving him to fly forth from the London

oven:—lo, the Tyrolese limestone crags with livid peaks and snow lining shelves and veins of the crevices; and folds of pinewood undulations closed by a shoulder of snow large on the blue; and a dazzling pinnacle rising over green pasture-Alps, the head of it shooting aloft as the blown billow, high off a broken ridge, and wide-armed in its pure white shroud beneath; tranced, but all motion in immobility, to the heart in the eye; a splendid image of striving, up to crowned victory. And see the long valley-sweeps of the hanging meadows and maize, and lower vineyards and central tall green spires! Walking beside young Dudley, conversing, observing too, Victor followed the trips and twists of a rill, that was lured a little further down through scoops, ducts, and scaffolded channels to serve a wainwright. He heard the mountain-song of the joyful water: a wren-robin-thrush on the dance down of a faun; till it was caught and muted, and the silver foot slid along the channel, swift as moonbeams through a cloud, with an air of "*Whither you will, so it be on;*" happy for service as

in freedom. Then the yard of the inn below, and the rill-water twirling rounded through the trout-trough, subdued, still lively for its beloved onward: dues to business, dues to pleasure; a wedding of the two, and the wisest on earth:—eh? like some one we know, and Nataly has made the comparison. Fresh *forellen* for lunch: rhyming to Fenellan, he had said to her; and that recollection struck the day to blaze; for his friend was a ruined military captain living on a literary quill at the time; and Nataly's tender pleading, "Could you not help to give him another chance, dear Victor?" — signifying her absolute trust in his ability to do that or more or anything, had actually set him thinking of the Insurance Office; which he started to prosperity, and Fenellan in it, previously an untutored rill of the mountains, if ever was one.

Useless to be dwelling on holiday pictures: Lakelands had hold of him!

Colney or somebody says, that the greater our successes, the greater the slaves we become.—But we must have an aim, my

friend, and success must be the aim of any aim !—Yes, and, says Colney, you are to rejoice in the disappointing miss, which saves you from being damned by your bullet on the centre.—You're dead against Nature, old Colney.—That is to carry the flag of Liberty.—By clipping a limb !

Victor overcame the Pessimist in his own royal cranium-Court. He entertained a pronounced dissension with bachelors pretending to independence. It could not be argued publicly, and the more the pity :—for a slight encouragement, he would have done it ; his outlook over the waves of bachelors and (by present conditions mostly constrained) spinsters—and another outlook, midnight upon Phlegethon to the thoughts of men, made him deem it urgent. And it helped the plea in his own excuse, as Colney pointed out to the son of Nature. That, he had to admit, was true. He charged it upon Mrs. Burman, for twisting the most unselfish and noblest of his thoughts ; and he promised himself it was to cease on the instant when the circumstance, which Nature was remiss in not bringing

about to-day or to-morrow, had come to pass. He could see his Nataly's pained endurance beneath her habitual submission. Her effort was a poor one, to conceal her dread of the day of the gathering at Lakelands.

On the Sunday previous to the day, Dr. Themison accompanied the amateurs by rail to Wrensham, to hear "trial of the acoustics" of the Concert-hall. They were a goodly company; and there was fun in the railway-carriage over Colney's description of Fashionable London's vast octopus Malady-monster, who was letting the doctor fly to the tether of its longest filament for an hour, plying suckers on him the while. He had the look, to general perception, of a man but half-escaped: and as when the notes of things taken by the vision in front are being set down upon tablets in the head behind. Victor observed his look at Nataly. The look was like a door aswing, revealing in concealing. She was not or did not appear struck by it: perhaps, if observant, she took it for a busy professional gentleman's holiday reckoning of the hours before the return train

to his harness, and his arrangements for catching it. She was, as she could be on a day of trial, her enchanting majestic self again—defying suspicions. She was his true mate for breasting a world honoured in uplifting her.

Her singing of a duet with Nesta, called forth Dr. Themison's very warm applause. He named the greatest of contraltos. Colney did better service than Fenellan at the luncheon-table: he diverted Nataly and captured Dr. Themison's ear with the narrative of his momentous expedition of European Emissaries, to plead the cause of their several languages at the Court of Japan: a Satiric Serial tale, that hit incidentally the follies of the countries of Europe, and intentionally, one had to think, those of Old England. Nesta set him going. Just when he was about to begin, she made her father laugh by crying out in a rapture, "Oh! Delphica!" For she was naughtily aware of Dudley Sowerby's distaste for the story and disgust with the damsel Delphica.

Nesta gave Dr. Themison the preliminary

sketch of the grand object of the expedition : indeed one of the eminent ones of the world ; matter for an Epic ; though it is to be feared, that our part in it will not encourage a Cis-Atlantic bard. To America the honours from beginning to end belong.

So, then, Japan has decided to renounce its language, for the adoption of the language it may choose among the foremost famous European tongues. Japan becomes the word for miraculous transformations of a whole people at the stroke of a wand ; and let our English enrol it as the most precious of the powerful verbs. An envoy visits the principal Seats of Learning in Europe. He is of a gravity to match that of his unexampled and all but stupefying mission. A fluent linguist, yet an Englishman, the slight American accent contracted during a lengthened residence in the United States is no bar to the patriotism urging him to pay his visit of exposition and invitation from the Japanese Court to the distinguished Doctor of Divinity Dr. Bouthoin. The renown of Dr. Bouthoin among the learned

of Japan has caused the special invitation to him ; a scholar endowed by an ample knowledge and persuasive eloquence to cite and instance as well as illustrate the superior advantages to Japan and civilization in the filial embrace of mother English. "For to this it must come predestinated," says the astonishing applicant. "We seem to see a fitness in it," says the cogitative Rev. Doctor. "And an Island England in those waters, will do wonders for Commerce," adds the former. "We think of things more pregnant," concludes the latter, with a dry gleam of ecclesiastical knowingness. And let the editor of the Review upon his recent pamphlet, and let the prelate reprimanding him, and let the newspapers criticizing his pure Saxon, have a care ! Funds, universally the most convincing of credentials, are placed at Dr. Bouthoin's disposal : only it is requested, that for the present the expedition be secret. "Better so," says pure Saxon's champion. On a day patented for secrecy, and swearing-in the whole American Continent through the cables to keep the secret by

declaring the patent, the Rev. Dr. Bouthoin, accompanied by his curate, the Rev. Mancate Semhians, stumbling across portmanteaux crammed with lexicons and dictionaries and other tubes of the voice of Hermes, takes possession of berths in the ship *Polypheme*, bound, as they mutually conceive, for the biggest adventure ever embarked on by a far-thoughted, high-thoughted, patriotic pair speaking pure Saxon or other.

Colney, with apologies to his hearers, avoided the custom of our period (called the Realistic) to create, when casual opportunity offers, a belief in the narrative by promoting nausea in the audience. He passed under veil the Rev. Doctor's acknowledgement of Neptune's power, and the temporary collapse of Mr. Semhians. Proceeding at once to the comments of these high-class missionaries on the really curious inquisitiveness of certain of the foreign passengers on board, he introduced to them the indisputably learned, the very argumentative, crashing, arrogant, pedantic, dogmatic, philological German gentleman, Dr. Gannius, reeking of the Teu-

tonic Professor, as a library volume of its leather. With him is his fair-haired artless daughter Delphica. An interesting couple for the beguilement of a voyage: she so beautifully moderates his irascible incisiveness! Yet there is a strange tone that they have. What, then, of the polite, the anecdotic Gallic M. Falarique, who studiously engages the young lady in colloquy when Mr. Semhians is agitating outside them to say a word? What of that out-pouring, explosive, equally voluble, uncontrolled M. Bobinikine, a Mongol Russian, shaped, featured, hued like the pot-boiled, round and tight young dumpling of our primitive boyhood, which smokes on the dish from the pot? And what of another, hitherto unnoticed, whose nose is of the hooked vulturine, whose name transpires as Pisistratus Mytharete? He hears Dr. Bouthoin declaim some lines of Homer, and beseeches him for the designation of that language. Greek, is it? Greek of the Asiatic ancient days of the beginning of the poetic chants? Dr. Gannius crashes cachinnation. Dr. Bouthoin caps

himself with the offended Don. Mr. Semhians opens half an eye and a whole mouth. There must be a mystery, these two exclaim to one another in privacy. Delphica draws Mr. Semhians aside. Blushing over his white necktie, like the coast of Labrador at the transient wink of its Jack-in-the-box Apollo, Mr. Semhians faintly tells of a conversation he has had with the ingenuous fair one; and she ardent as he for the throning of our incomparable Saxon English in the mouths of the races of mankind. Strange!—she partly suspects the Frenchman, the Russian, the attentive silent Greek, to be all of them bound for the Court of Japan. Concurrents? Can it be? We are absolutely to enter on a contention with rivals? Dr. Bouthoin speaks to Dr. Gannius. He is astonished, he says; he could not have imagined it! “Have you ever imagined anything?” Dr. Gannius asks him. Entomologist, botanist, palæontologist, philologist, and at sound of horn a ready regimental corporal, Dr. Gannius wears good manners as a pair of bath-slippers, to rally and kick his old infant of an Englishman;

who, in awe of his later renown and manifest might, makes it a point of discretion to be ultra-amiable; for he certainly is not in training, he has no alliances, and he must diplomatize; and the German is a strong one; a relative too; he is the Saxon's cousin, to say the least. This German has the habit of pushing past politeness to carry his argumentative war into the enemy's country: and he presents on all sides a solid rampart of recent great deeds done, and mailed readiness for the doing of more, if we think of assailing him in that way. We are really like the poor beasts which have cast their shells or cases, helpless flesh to his beak. So we are cousinly.

Whether more amused than amazed, we know not, Dr. Gannius hears from "our simpleton of the pastures," as he calls the Rev. Doctor to his daughter, that he and Mr. Semhians have absolutely pushed forth upon this most mighty of enterprises naked of any backing from their Government! Babes in the Wood that they are! *à la grace de dieu* at every turn that cries for astutia,

they show no sign or symbol of English arms behind them, to support—and with the grandest of national prizes in view!—the pleading oration before the Court of the elect, erudites, we will call them, of an intelligent, yet half barbarous, people; hesitating, these, between eloquence and rival eloquence, cunning and rival cunning. Why, in such a case, the shadow-nimbus of Force is needed to decide the sinking of the scales. But have these English *never read their Shakespeare*, that they show so barren an acquaintance with human, to say nothing of semi-barbaric, nature? But it is here that we Germans prove our claim to being the sons of his mind.—Dr. Gannius, in contempt, throws off the mask: he also is a concurrent. And not only is he the chosen by election of the chief Universities of his land, he has behind him, as Athene dilating Achilles, the clenched fist of the Prince of thunder and lightning of his time. German, Japan shall be! he publicly swears before them all. M. Falarique damascenes his sharpest smile; M. Bobinikine double-dimples his puddingest;

M. Mytharete rolls a forefinger over his beak ; Dr. Bouthoin enlarges his eye on a sunny mote. And such is the masterful effect of a frank diplomacy, that when one party shows his hand, the others find the reverse of concealment in hiding their own. Dr. Bouthoin and Mr. Semhians are compelled to suspect themselves to be encompassed with rivals, presumptively supported by their Governments. The worthy gentlemen had hoped to tumble into good fortune, as in the blessed old English manner. "It has even been thus with us : unhelped we do it !" exclaims the Rev. Doctor. He is roused from dejection by hearing Mr. Semhians shyly (he has published verse) tell of the fair-tressed Delphica's phosphorial enthusiasm for our galaxy of British Poets. Assisted by Mr. Semhians, he begins to imagine, that he has, in the person of this artless devotee an ally, who will, through her worship of our Poets (by treachery to her sire—a small matter) sacrifice her guttural tongue, by enabling him (through the exercise of her arts, charms, intrigues—also a small matter) to obtain the

first audience of the Japanese erudites.—Delphica, with each of the rivals in turn, is very pretty Comedy. She is aware that M. Falarique is her most redoubtable adversary, by the time that the vast fleet of steamboats (containing newspaper reporters) is beheld from the decks of the *Polypheme* puffing past Sandy Hook.

There Colney left them, for the next instalment of the serial.

Nesta glanced at Dudley Sowerby. She liked him for his pained frown at the part his countrymen were made to play, but did wish that he would keep from expressing it in a countenance that suggested a worried knot; and mischievously she said: "Do you take to Delphica?"

He replied, with an evident sincerity, "I cannot say I do."

Had Mr. Semhians been modelled on him?

"One bets on the German, of course—with Colney Durance," Victor said to Dr. Themison, leading him over the grounds of Lakelands.

"In any case, the author teaches us to feel

an interest in the rivals. I want to know what comes of it," said the doctor.

"There's a good opportunity, one sees. But, mark me, it will all end in satire upon poor Old England. According to Colney, we excel in nothing."

"I do not think there is a country that could offer the entertainment for which I am indebted to you to-day."

"Ah, my friend, and you like their voices? The contralto?"

"Exquisite."

Dr. Themison had not spoken the name of Radnor.

"Shall we see you at our next concert-evening in town?" said Victor; and hearing "the privilege" mentioned, his sharp bright gaze cleared to limpid. "You have seen how it stands with us here!" At once he related what indeed Dr. Themison had begun speculatively to think might be the case.

Mrs. Burman Radnor had dropped words touching a husband, and of her desire to communicate with him, in the event of her being given over to the surgeons: she had

said, that her husband was a greatly gifted man; setting her head in a compassionate swing. This revelation of the husband soon after, was filling. And this Mr. Radnor's comrade's manner of it, was winning: a not too self-justifying tone; not void of feeling for the elder woman; with a manly eulogy of the younger, who had flung away the world for him and borne him their one dear child. Victor took the blame wholly upon himself. "It is right that you should know," he said to the doctor's thoughtful posture; and he stressed the blame; and a flame shot across his eyeballs. He brought home to his hearer the hurricane of a man he was in the passion: indicating the subjection of such a temperament as this Victor Radnor's to trials of the moral restraints beyond his human power.

Dr. Themison said: "Would you—we postpone *that* as long as we can: but supposing the poor lady . . . ?"

Victor broke in: "I see her wish: I will."

The clash of his answer rang beside Dr. Themison's faltering query.

We are grateful when spared the conclusion of a sentence born to stammer. If for that only, the doctor pressed Victor's hand warmly.

"I may, then, convey some form of assurance, that a request of the kind will be granted?" he said.

"She has but to call me to her," said Victor, stiffening his back.

CHAPTER V.

THE GREAT ASSEMBLY AT LAKELANDS.

ROUND the neighbourhood of Lakelands it was known that the day of the great gathering there had been authoritatively foretold as fine, by Mr. Victor Radnor ; and he delivered his prophecy in the teeth of the South-western gale familiar to our yachting month ; and he really inspired belief or a kind of trust ; some supposing him to draw from reserves of observation, some choosing to confide in the singularly winged sparkle of his eyes. Lady Rodwell Blachington did ; and young Mrs. Blathenoy ; and Mrs. Fanning ; they were enamoured of it. And when women stand for Hope, and any worshipped man for Promise, nothing less than redoubled confusion of him dissolves the union. Even then they

cling to it, under an ejaculation, that it might and should have been otherwise; fancy partly has it otherwise, in her cærulean home above the weeping. So it is good at all points to prophecy with the aspect of the radiant day foretold.

A storm, bearing battle overhead, tore the night to pieces. Nataly's faith in the pleasant prognostic wavered beneath the crashes. She had not much power of heart to desire anything save that which her bosom disavowed. Uproar rather appeased her, calmness agitated. She wished her beloved to be spared from a disappointment, thinking he deserved all successes, because of the rigours inflicted by her present tonelessness of blood and being. Her unresponsive manner with him was not due to lack of fire in the blood or a loss of tenderness. The tender feeling, under privations unwillingly imposed, though willingly shared, now suffused her reflections, owing to a gratitude induced by a novel experience of him; known, as it may chance, and as it does not always chance, to both sexes in wedded intimacy here and there;

known to women whose mates are proved quick to compliance with delicate intuitions of their moods of nature. A constant, almost visible, image of the dark thing she desired, and was bound not to desire, and was remorseful for desiring, oppressed her; a perpetual consequent warfare of her spirit and the nature subject to the thousand sensational hypocrisies invoked for concealment of its reviled brutish baseness, held the woman suspended from her emotions. She coldly felt that a caress would have melted her, would have been the temporary rapture. Coldly she had the knowledge that the considerate withholding of it helped her spirit to escape a stain. Less coldly, she thanked at heart her beloved, for being a gentleman in their yoke. It plighted them over flesh.

He talked to her on the pillow, just a few sentences; and, unlike himself, a word of City affairs: "That fellow Blathenoy, with his increasing multitude of bills at the Bank: must watch him there, sit there regularly. One rather likes his wife. By the way, if you see him near me to-morrow, praise the

Spanish climate; don't forget. He heads the subscription list of Lady Blachington's Charity."

Victor chuckled at Colney's humping of shoulders and mouth, while the tempest seemed echoing a sulphureous pessimist. "If old Colney had listened to me, when India gave proof of the metal and South Africa began heaving, he'd have been a fairly wealthy man by now . . . ha! it would have genialized him. A man may be a curmudgeon with money: the rule is for him to cuddle himself and take a side, instead of dashing at his countrymen all round and getting hated. Well, Colney popular, can't be imagined; but entertaining guests would have diluted his acid. He has the six hundred or so a-year he started old bachelor on; add his miserable pay for Essays. Literature! Of course, he sours. But don't let me hear of bachelors moralists. There he sits at his Temple Chambers hatching epigrams . . . pretends to have the office of critic! Honest old fellow, as far as his condition permits. I tell him it *will* be fine to-morrow."

“ You are generally right, dear,” Nataly said.

Her dropping breath was audible.

Victor smartly commended her to slumber, with heaven’s blessing on her and a dose of soft nursery prattle.

He squeezed her hand. He kissed her lips by day. She heard him sigh settling himself into the breast of night for milk of sleep, like one of the world’s good children. She could have turned to him, to show him she was in harmony with the holy night and loving world, but for the fear founded on a knowledge of the man he was; it held her frozen to the semblance of a tombstone lady beside her lord, in the aisle where horror kindles pitchy blackness with its legions at one movement. Verily it was the ghost of Mrs. Burman come to the bed, between them.

Meanwhile the sun of Victor Radnor’s popularity was already up over the extended circle likely to be drenched by a falsification of his daring augury, though the scud flew swift, and the beeches raved, and the oaks roared and snarled, and pine-trees fell their

lengths. Fine to-morrow, to a certainty ! he had been heard to say. The doubt weighed for something ; the balance inclined with the gentleman who had become so popular : for he had done the trick so suddenly, like a stroke of the wizard ; and was a real man, not one of your spangled zodiacs selling for sixpence and hopping to a lucky hit, laughed at nine times out of ten. The reasoning went—and it somewhat affected the mansion as well as the cottage,—that if he had become popular in this astonishing fashion, after making one of the biggest fortunes of modern times, he might, he must, have secret gifts. “ You can’t foretell weather ! ” cried a pot-house sceptic. But the workmen at Lakelands declared that he had foretold it. Sceptics among the common folk were quaintly silenced by other tales of him, being a whiff from the delirium attending any mention of his name.

How had he become suddenly so popular as to rouse in the mind of Mr. Caddis, the sitting Member for the division of the county (said to have the seat in his pocket), a par-

ticular inquisitiveness to know the bearing of his politics? Mr. Radnor was rich, true: but these are days when wealthy men, ambitious of notoriety, do not always prove faithful to their class; some of them are cunning to bid for the suffrages of the irresponsible, recklessly enfranchised, corruptible masses. Mr. Caddis, if he had the seat in his pocket, had it from the support of a class trusting him to support its interests: he could count on the landowners, on the clergy, on the retired or retiring or comfortably cushioned merchants resident about Wrensham, on the many obsequious among electoral shopmen; annually he threw open his grounds, and he subscribed, patronized, did what was expected; and he was not popular; he was unpopular. Why? But why was the sun of this 23rd August, shining from its rise royally upon pacified, enrolled and liveried armies of cloud, more agreeable to earth's populations than his pinched appearance of the poor mopped red nose and melancholic rheumy eyelets on a January day! Undoubtedly Victor Radnor risked

his repute of prophet. Yet his popularity would have survived the continuance of the storm and deluge. He did this:—and the mystery puzzling the suspicious was nothing wonderful:—in addition to a transparent benevolence, he spread a sort of assurance about him, that he thought the better of the people for their thinking well of themselves. It came first from the workmen at his house. “The right sort, and no humbug: likes you to be men.” Such a report made tropical soil for any new seed.

Now, it is a postulate, to strengthen all poor commoners, that not even in comparison with the highest need we be small unless we yield to think it of ourselves. Do but stretch a hand to the touch of earth in you, and you spring upon combative manhood again, from the basis where all are equal. Humanity’s historians, however, tell us, that the exhilaration bringing us consciousness of a stature, is gas which too frequently has to be administered. Certes the cocks among men do not require the process; they get it off the sight of the sun arising or a simple hen

submissive: but we have our hibernating bears among men, our yoked oxen, cabhorses, beaten dogs; we have on large patches of these Islands, a Saxon population, much wanting assistance, if they are not to feel themselves beaten, driven, caught by the neck, yoked and heavy-headed. Blest, then, is he who gives them a sense of the pride of standing on legs. Beer, ordinarily their solitary helper beneath the iron canopy of wealth, is known to them as a bitter usurer; it knocks them flat in their persons and their fortunes, for the short spell of recreative exaltation. They send up their rough glory round the name of the gentleman—a stranger, but their friend: and never is friend to be thought of as a stranger—who manages to get the holiday for Wrensham and thereabout, that they may hurl away for one jolly day the old hat of a doddered humbleness, and trip to the strains of the internal music he has unwound.

Says he: Is it a Charity Concert? Charity begins at home, says he: and if I welcome you gentry on behalf of the poor of London, why, it follows you grant me the right to

make a beginning with the poor of our parts down here. He puts it so, no master nor mistress neither could refuse him. Why, the workmen at his house were nigh pitching the contractors all sprawling on a strike, and Mr. Radnor takes train, harangues 'em and rubs 'em smooth; ten minutes by the clock, they say; and return train to his business in town; by reason of good sense and feeling, it was; poor men don't ask for more. A working man, all the world over, asks but justice and a little relaxation—just a collar of fat to his lean.

Mr. Caddis, M.P., pursuing the riddle of popularity, which irritated and repelled as constantly as it attracted him, would have come nearer to an instructive presentment of it, by listening to these plain fellows, than he was in the line of equipages, at a later hour of the day. The remarks of the comfortably cushioned and wheeled, though they be eulogistic to extravagance, are vapourish when we court them for nourishment; substantially, they are bones to the cynical. He heard enumerations of Mr. Radnor's riches,

eclipsing his own past compute. A merchant, a holder of mines, Director of a mighty Bank, projector of running Rails, a princely millionaire, and determined to be popular—what was the aim of the man? It is the curse of modern times, that we never can be sure of our Parliamentary seat; not when we have it in our pockets! The Romans have left us golden words with regard to the fickleness of the populace; we have our Horace, our Juvenal, we have our Johnson; and in this vaunted age of reason it is, that we surrender ourselves into the hands of the populace! *Panem et circenses!* Mr. Caddis repeated it, after his fathers; his fathers and he had not headed them out of that original voracity. There they were, for moneyed legislators to bewail their appetites. And it was an article of his legislation, to keep them there.

Pedestrian purchasers of tickets for the Charity Concert, rather openly, in an envelope of humour, confessed to the bait of the Radnor bread with bit of fun. Savoury rumours were sweeping across Wrensham. Mr. Radnor had borrowed footmen of the

principal houses about. Cartloads of provisions had been seen to come. An immediate reward of a deed of benevolence, is a thing sensibly heavenly ; and the five-shilling tickets were paid for as if for a packet on the counter. Unacquainted with Mr. Radnor, although the reports of him struck a summons to their gastric juices, resembling in its effect a clamorous cordiality, they were chilled, on their steps along the half-rolled new gravel-road to the house, by seeing three tables of prodigious length, where very evidently a feast had raged : one to plump the people—perhaps excessively courted by great gentlemen of late ; shopkeepers, the villagers, children. These had been at it for two merry hours. They had risen. They were beef and pudding on legs ; in some quarters, beer amiably manifest, owing to the flourishes of a military band. Boys, who had shaken room through their magical young corporations for fresh stowage, darted out of a chasing circle to the crumbled cornucopia regretfully forsaken fifteen minutes back, and buried another tart. Plenty still

reigned : it was the will of the Master that it should.

We divert our attention, resigned in stoic humour, to the bill of the Concert music, handed us with our tickets at the park-gates : we have no right to expect refreshment ; we came for the music, to be charitable. Signora Bianca Luciani : of whom we have read almost to the hearing her ; enough to make the mistake at times. The grand violinist Durandarte : forcibly detained on his way to America. Mr. Radnor sent him a blank cheque :—no !—so Mr. Radnor besought him in person : he is irresistible ; a great musician himself ; it is becoming quite the modern style. We have now English noblemen who play the horn, the fife—the drum, some say ! We may yet be Merrie England again, with our nobles taking the lead.

England's nobles as a musical band at the head of a marching and dancing population, pictured happily an old Conservative country, that retained its members of aristocracy in the foremost places while subjecting them to

downright uses. Their ancestors, beholding them there, would be satisfied on the point of honour; perhaps enlivened by hearing them at fife and drum.—

But middle-class pedestrians, having paid five shillings for a ticket to hear the music they love, and not having full assurance of refreshment, are often, latterly, satirical upon their superiors; and, over this country at least, require the refreshment, that the democratic sprouts in them may be reconciled with aristocracy. Do not listen to them further on the subject. They vote safely enough when the day comes, if there is no præternaturally strong pull the other way.

They perceive the name of the Hon. Dudley Sowerby, fourth down the Concert-bill; marked for a flute-duet with Mr. Victor Radnor, Miss Nesta Victoria Radnor accompanying at the piano. It may mean? . . . do you want a whisper to suggest to you what it may mean? The father's wealth is enormous; the mother is a beautiful majestic woman in her prime. And see, she sings: a wonderful voice. And lower down,

a duet with her daughter: violins and clarionet; how funny; something Hungarian. And in the Second Part, Schubert's *Ave Maria*—Oh! when we hear that, we dissolve. She was a singer before he married her, they say: a lady by birth: one of the first County families. But it was a gift, and she could not be kept from it, and was going, when they met—and it was love! the most perfect duet. For him she abandoned the Stage. You must remember, that in their young days the Stage was many stages beneath the esteem entertained for it now. Domestic Concerts are got up to gratify her: a Miss Fredericks: good old English name. Mr. Radnor calls his daughter, Freddy; so Mr. Taplow, the architect, says. They are for modern music and ancient. *Tannhäuser*, Wagner, you see. Pergolese. Flute-duet, Mercadante. Here we have him!—Durandarte: *Air Basque*, variations—his own. Again, Señor Durandarte, Mendelssohn. Encore him, and he plays you a national piece. A dark little creature a Life-guardsmen could hold-up on his outstretched hand

for the fifteen minutes of the performance; but he fills the hall and thrills the heart, wafts you to heaven; and does it as though he were conversing with his Andalusian lady-love in easy whispers about their mutual passion for Spanish chocolate all the while: so the musical critic of the *Tirra-Lirra* says. Express trains every half hour from London; all the big people of the city. Mr. Radnor commands them, like Royalty. Totally different from that old figure of the wealthy City merchant; young, vigorous, elegant, a man of taste, highest culture, speaks the languages of Europe, patron of the Arts, a perfect gentleman. His mother was one of the Montgomerys, Mr. Taplow says. And it was General Radnor, a most distinguished officer, dying knighted. But Mr. Victor Radnor would not take less than a Barony—and then only with descent of title to his daughter, in her own right.

Mr. Taplow had said as much as Victor Radnor chose that he should say.

Carriages were in flow for an hour: pedestrians formed a wavy coil. Judging

by numbers, the entertainment was a success, would the hall contain them? Marvels were told of the hall. Every ticket entered and was enfolded; almost all had a seat. Chivalry stood. It is a breeched abstraction, sacrificing voluntarily and genially to the Fair, for a restoring of the balance between the sexes, that the division of good things be rather in the fair ones' favour, as they are to think: with the warning to them, that the establishment of their claim for equality puts an end to the priceless privileges of petticoats. Women must be mad, to provoke such a warning; and the majority of them submissively show their good sense. They send up an incense of perfumery, all the bouquets of the chemist commingled; most nourishing to the idea of woman in the nose of man. They are a forest foliage-rustle of silks and muslins, magic interweaving, or the mythology, if you prefer it. See, hear, smell, they are Juno, Venus, Hebe, to you. We must have poetry with them; otherwise they are better in the kitchen. Is there—but there is not; there is not present one of the chivalrous

breeched who could prefer the shocking emancipated gristly female, which imposes propriety on our sensations and inner dreams, by petrifying in the tender bud of them. Colonel Corfe is the man to hear on such a theme. He is a colonel of Companies. But those are his diversion, as the British Army has been to the warrior. *Puellis idoneus*, he is professedly a lady's man, a rose-beetle, and a fine specimen of a common kind: and he has been that thing, that shining delight of the lap of ladies, for a spell of years, necessitating a certain sparkle of the saccharine crystals preserving him, to conceal the muster. He has to be fascinating, or he would look outworn, forlorn. On one side of him is Lady Carmine; on the other, Lady Swanage; dames embedded in the blooming maturity of England's conservatory. Their lords (an Earl, a Baron) are of the lords who go down to the City to sow a title for a repair of their poor incomes, and are to be commended for frankly accepting the new dispensation while they retain the many advantages of the uncanceled ancient. Thus gently does a

maternal Old England let them down. Projectors of Companies, Directors, Founders; Railway magnates, actual kings and nobles (though one cannot yet persuade old reverence to do homage with the ancestral spontaneity to the uncrowned, uncoroneted, people of our sphere); holders of Shares in gold mines, Shares in Afric's blue mud of the glittering teeth we draw for English beauty to wear in the ear, on the neck, at the wrist; Bankers and wives of Bankers. Victor passed among them, chatting right and left.

Lady Carmine asked him: "Is Durandarte counted on?"

He answered: "I made sure of the Luciani."

She serenely understood. Artistes are licenced people, with a Bohemian instead of the titular glitter for the bewildering of moralists; as paste will pass for diamonds where the mirror is held up to Nature by bold supernumeraries.

He wished to introduce Nesta. His girl was on the raised orchestral flooring. Nataly held her fast to a music-scroll.

Mr. Peridon, sad for the absence and cause of absence of Louise de Seilles,—summoned in the morning abruptly to Bourges, where her brother lay with his life endangered by an accident at Artillery practice,—Mr. Peridon was generally conductor. Victor was to lead the full force of amateurs in the brisk overture to *Zampa*. He perceived a movement of Nataly, Nesta, and Peridon. “They have come,” he said; he jumped on the orchestra boards and hastened to greet the Luciani with Durandarte in the retiring-room.

His departure raised the whisper that he would wield the bâton. An opinion was unuttered. His name for the flute-duet with the Hon. Dudley Sowerby had not provoked the reserve opinion; it seemed, on the whole, a pretty thing in him to condescend to do: the sentiment he awakened was not flustered by it. But the act of leading, appeared as an official thing to do. Our soufflé of sentiment will be seen subsiding under a breath, without a repressive word to send it down. Sir Rodwell Blachington would have preferred Radnor’s not leading or playing either.

Colonel Corfe and Mr. Caddis declined to consider such conduct English, in a man of station . . . notwithstanding Royal Highnesses, who are at least partly English : *partly*, we say, under our breath, remembering our old ideal of an English gentleman, in opposition to German tastes. It is true, that the whole country is changeing, decomposing !

The colonel fished for Lady Carmine's view.—And Lady Swanage too? Both of the distinguished ladies approved of Mr. Radnor's leading—for a leading off. Women are pleased to see their favourite in the place of prominence—as long as Fortune swims him unbuffeted, or one should say, unbattered, up the mounting wave. Besides these ladies had none of the colonel's remainder of juvenile English sense of the manly, his adolescent's intolerance of the eccentric, suspicion and contempt of any supposed affectation, which was not ostentatiously, stakingly practised to subdue the sex. And you cannot wield a bâton without looking affected. And at one of the Colonel's Clubs in town,

only five years back, an English musical composer, who had not then made his money—now by the mystery of events *knighted*!—had been (he makes now fifteen thousand a year) black-balled. “Fiddler? no; can’t admit a Fiddler to associate on equal terms with gentlemen.” Only five years back: and at present we are having the Fiddler everywhere.

A sprinkling of the minor ladies also would have been glad if Mr. Radnor had kept himself somewhat more exclusive. Dr. Schlesien heard remarks, upon which his weighty Teutonic mind sat crushingly. Do these English care one bit for music?—for anything finer than material stuffs?—what that man Durance calls, ‘their beef, their beer, and their pew in eternity’? His wrath at their babble and petty brabble doubted that they did.

But they do. Art has a hold of them. They pay for it; and the thing purchased grapples. It will get to their bosoms to breathe from them in time: entirely overcoming the taste for feudalism, which still

a little objects to see their born gentleman acting as leader of musicians. A people of slow movement, developing tardily, their country is wanting in the distincter features, from being always in the transitional state, like certain sea-fish rolling head over—you know not head from tail. Without the Welsh, Irish, Scot, in their composition, there would not be much of the yeasty ferment: but it should not be forgotten that Welsh, Irish, Scot, are now largely of their numbers; and the taste for elegance, and for spiritual utterance, for Song, nay, for Ideas, is there among them, though it does not everywhere cover a rocky surface to bewitch the eyes of aliens;—like Louise de Seilles and Dr. Schlesien, for example; aliens having no hostile disposition toward the people they were compelled to criticize; honourably granting, that this people has a great history. Even such has the Lion, with Homer for the transcriber of his deeds. But the gentle aliens would image our emergence from wildness as the unsocial spectacle presented by the drear menagerie Lion, alone or mated; with hardly

an animated moment save when the raw red joint is beneath his paw, reminding him of the desert's pasture.

Nevertheless, where Strength is, there is hope :—it may be said more truly than of the breath of Life ; which is perhaps but the bucket of breath, muddy with the sediment of the well : whereas we have in Strength a hero, if a malefactor ; whose muscles shall haul him up to the light he will prove worthy of, when that divinity has shown him his uncleanness. And when Strength is not exercising, you are sure to see Satirists jump on his back. Dozens, foreign and domestic, are on the back of Old England ; a tribute to our quality if at the same time an irritating scourge. The domestic are in excess ; and let us own that their view of the potentate, as an apathetic beast of power, who will neither show the power nor woo the graces ; pretending all the while to be eminently above the beast, and posturing in an inefficient mimicry of the civilized, excites to satire. Colney Durance had his excuses. He could point to the chief creative minds of the country for generations,

as beginning their survey genially, ending venomously, because of an exasperating unreason and scum in the bubble of the scenes, called social, around them. Viola under his chin, he gazed along the crowded hall, which was to him a rich national pudding of the sycophants, the hypocrites, the burlies, the idiots; dregs of the depths and froth of the surface; bowing to one, that they may scorn another; instituting a Charity, for their poorer fawning fellows to relieve their purses and assist them in tricking the world and their Maker:—and so forth, a tiresome tirade: and as it was not on his lips, but in the stomach of the painful creature, let him grind that hurdy-gurdy for himself. His friend Victor set it stirring: Victor had here what he aimed at! How Success derides Ambition! And for this he imperilled the happiness of the worthy woman he loved! Exposed her to our fen-fogs and foul snakes—of whom one or more might be in the assembly now: all because of his insane itch to be the bobbing cork on the wave of the minute! Colney's rapid interjections condensed upon the habitual

shrug at human folly, just when Victor, fronting the glassy stare of Colonel Corfe, tapped to start his orchestra through the lively first bars of the overture to *Zampa*.

We soon perceive that the post Mr. Radnor fills he thoroughly fills, whatever it may be. *Zampa* takes horse from the opening. We have no amateur conductor riding ahead : violins, 'cellos, piano, wind-stops : Peridon, Catkin, Pempton, Yatt, Cormyn, Colney, Mrs. Cormyn, Dudley Sowerby : they are spirited on, patted, subdued, muted, raised, rushed anew, away, held in hand, in both hands. Not earnestness worn as a cloak, but issuing, we see ; not simply a leader of musicians, a leader of men. The halo of the millionaire behind, assures us of a development in the character of England's merchant princes. The homage we pay him flatters us. A delightful overture, masterfully executed ; ended too soon ; except that the programme forbids the ordinary interpretation of prolonged applause. Mr. Radnor is one of those who do everything consummately. And we have a monition within, that a course of

spiritual enjoyment will rouse the call for bodily refreshment. His genial nod and laugh and word of commendation to his troop persuade us oddly, we know not how, of provision to come. At the door of the retiring-room, see, he is congratulated by Luciani and Durandarte. Miss Priscilla Graves is now to sing a *Schumann*. Down later, it is a duet with the Rev. Septimus Barmby. We have nothing to be ashamed of in her, before an Italian Operatic singer! Ices after the first part is over.

CHAPTER VI.

DARTREY FENELLAN.

HAD Nataly and Nesta known who was outside helping Skepsey to play ball with the boys, they would not have worked through their share of the performance with so graceful a composure. Even Simeon Fenellan was unaware that his half-brother Dartrey had landed in England. Dartrey went first to Victor's office, where he found Skepsey packing the day's letters and circulars into the bag for the delivery of them at Lakelands. They sprang a chatter, and they missed the last of the express trains: which did not greatly signify, Skepsey said, "as it was a Concert." To hear his hero talk, was the music for him; and he richly enjoyed the pacing along the railway-platform.

Arrived on the grounds, they took opposite sides in a game of rounders, at that moment tossing heads or tails for innings. These boys were slovenly players, and were made unhappy by Skepsey's fussy instructions to them in smartness. They had a stupid way of feeding the stick, and they ran sprawling; it concerned Great Britain for them to learn how to use their legs. It was pitiful for the country to see how lumpish her younger children were. Dartrey knew his little man and laughed, after warning him that his English would want many lessons before they stomached the mixture of discipline and pleasure. So it appeared: the pride of the boys in themselves, their confidence, enjoyment of the game, were all gone; and all were speedily out but Skepsey; who ran for the rounder, with his coat off, sharp as a porpoise, and would have got it, he had it in his grasp, when, at the jump, just over the line of the goal, a clever fling, if ever was, caught him a crack on that part of the human frame where sound is best achieved. Then were these young lumps transformed to

limber, lither, merry fellows. They rejoiced Skepsey's heart; they did everything better, ran and dodged and threw in a style to win the nod from the future official inspector of Games and Amusements of the common people; a deputy of the Government, proposed by Skepsey to his hero with a deferential eagerness. Dartrey clapped him on the shoulder, softly laughing.

“System—Mr. Durance is right—they *must* have system, if they are to appreciate a holiday,” Skepsey said; and he sent a wretched gaze around, at the justification of some of the lurid views of Mr. Durance, in signs of the holiday wasted;—impoverishing the country's manhood: in a small degree, it may be argued, but we ask, can the country afford it, while foreign nations are drilling their youth, teaching them to be ready to move in squads or masses, like the fist of a pugilist. Skepsey left it to his look to speak his thought. He saw an enemy in tobacco. The drowsiness of beer had stretched various hulks under trees. Ponderous cricket lumbered half-alive. Flabby fun knocked-up a yell.

And it was rather vexatious to see girls dancing in good time to the band-music. One had a male-partner, who hopped his loutish burlesque of the thing he could not do.

Apparently, too certainly, none but the girls had a notion of orderly muscular exercise. Of what use are girls! Girls have their one mission on earth; and let them be healthy by all means, for the sake of it; only, they should not seem to prove that Old England is better represented on the female side. Skepsey heard, with a nip of spite at his bosom, a small body of them singing in chorus as they walked in step, arm in arm, actually marched: and to the rearward, none of these girls heeding, there were the louts at their burlesque of jigs and fisticuffs! ‘*Cherry Ripe*,’ was the song.

“It’s delightful to hear them!” said Dartrey.

Skepsey muttered jealously of their having been trained.

The song, which drew Dartrey Fenellan to the quick of an English home, planted him at the same time in Africa to hear it. Dewy

on a parched forehead it fell, England the shedding heaven.

He fetched a deep breath, as of gratitude for vital refreshment. He had his thoughts upon the training of our English to be something besides the machinery of capitalists, and upon the country as a blessed mother instead of the most capricious of maudlin stepdames.

He flicked his leg with the stick he carried, said: "Your master's the man to make a change among them, old friend!" and strolled along to a group surrounding two fellows who shammed a bout at single-stick. Vacuity in the attack on either side, contributed to the joint success of the defense. They paused under inspection; and Dartrey said: "You're burning to give them a lesson, Skepsey."

Skepsey had no objection to his hero's doing so, though at his personal cost.

The sticks were handed to them; the crowd increased; their rounders boys had spied them, and came trooping to the scene. Skepsey was directed to hit in earnest. His defensive attitude flashed, and he was at head and right.

and left leg, and giving point, recovering, thrusting madly, and again at shoulder and thigh, with bravos for reward of a man meaning business; until a topper on his hat, a cut over the right thigh, and the stick in his middle-rib, told the spectators of a scientific adversary; and loudly now the gentleman was cheered. An undercurrent of warm feeling ran for the plucky little one at it hot again in spite of the strokes, and when he fetched his master a handsome thud across the shoulder, and the gentleman gave up and complimented him, Skepsey had applause. He then begged his hero to put the previous couple in position, through a few of the opening movements. They were horribly sheepish at first. Meantime two boys had got hold of sticks, and both had gone to work in Skepsey's gallant style; and soon one was howling. He excused himself, because of the funny-bone, situated, in his case, higher than usual up the arm. And now the pair of men were giving and taking cuts to make a rhinoceros caper.

“Very well; begin that way; try what you can bear,” said Dartrey.

Skepsey watched them, in felicity for love of the fray, pained by the disregard of science.

Comments on the pretty play, indicating a reminiscent acquaintance with it, and the capacity for critical observations, were started. Assaults, wonderful tricks of a slashing Life-Guardsman, one spectator had witnessed at an exhibition in a London hall. Boxing too. You may see displays of boxing still in places. How about a prize-fight?—With money on it?—Eh, but you don't expect men to stand up to be knocked into rumpsteaks for nothing?—No, but it's they there bets!—Right, and that's a game gone to ruin along of outsiders.—But it always was and it always will be popular with Englishmen!

Great English names of young days, before the wintry shadow of the law had blighted them, received their withered laurels. Emulous boys were in the heroic posture. Good! sparring does no hurt: Skepsey seized a likely lad, Dartrey another. Nature created the Ring for them. Now then, arms and head well up, chest hearty, shoulders down, out with the right fist, just below the level of the

chin; out with the left fist farther, right out, except for that bit of curve; so, and draw it slightly back for wary—pussy at the spring. Firm you stand, feeling the muscles of both legs, left half a pace ahead, right planted, both stringy. None of your milk-pail looks; show us jaw, you bull-dogs. Now then, left from the shoulder, straight at right of head. —Good, and alacrity called on vigour in Skepsey's pupil; Dartrey's had the fist on his mouth before he could parry right arm up. "Foul blow!" Dartrey cried. Skepsey vowed to the contrary. Dartrey reiterated his charge. Skepsey was a figure of the negative, gesticulating and protesting. Dartrey appealed tempestuously to the Ring; Skepsey likewise, in a tone of injury. He addressed a remonstrance to Captain Dartrey. "Hang your captain, sir! I call you a coward; come on," said the resolute gentleman, already in ripe form for the attack. His blue eyes were like the springing sunrise over ridges of the seas; and Skepsey jumped to his meaning.

Boys and men were spectators of a real scientific set-to, a lovely show. They were

half puzzled, it seemed so deadly. And the little one got in his blows at the gentleman, who had to be hopping. Only, the worse the gentleman caught it, the friendlier his countenance became. That was the wonder, and that gave them the key. But it was deliciously near to the real thing.

Dartrey and Skepsey shook hands.

"And now, you fellows, you're to know, that this is one of the champions; and you take your lesson from him and thank him," Dartrey said, as he turned on his heel to strike and greet the flow from the house.

"Dartrey come!" Victor, Fenellan, Colney, had him by the hand in turn. Pure sweetness of suddenly awakened joy sat in Nataly's eyes as she swam to welcome him. Nesta moved a step, seemed hesitating, and she tripped forward. "Dear Captain Dartrey!"

He did not say: "But what a change in you!"

"*It is* blue-butterfly, all the same," Nataly spoke to his look.

Victor hurriedly pronounced the formal introduction between the Hon. Dudley Sowerby

and Captain Dartrey Fenellan. The bronze face and the milky bowed to one another ceremoniously; the latter faintly flushing.

“So here you are at last,” Victor said.
“You stay with us.”

“To-morrow or later, if you’ll have me. I go down to my people to-night.”

“But you stay in England now?” Nataly’s voice wavered on the question.

“There’s a chance of my being off to Upper Burmah before the week’s ended.”

“Ah, dear, dear!” sighed Fenellan; “and out of good comes evil!—as grandfather Deucalion exclaimed, when he gallantly handed up his dripping wife from the mud of the Deluge waters. Do you mean to be running and Jewing it on for ever, with only a nod for friends, Dart?”

“Lord, Simmy, what a sound of home there is in your old nonsense!” Dartrey said.

His eyes of strong dark blue colour and the foreign swarthiness of his brows and cheeks and neck mixed the familiar and the strange, in the sight of the women who knew him.

The bill-broker's fair-tressed young wife whispered of curiosity concerning him to Nataly. He dressed like a sailor, he stood like a soldier : and was he married ? Yes, he was married.

Mrs. Blathenoy imagined a something in Mrs. Radnor's tone. She could account for it ; not by the ordinary reading of the feminine in the feminine, but through a husband who professed to know secrets. She was young in years and experience, ten months wedded, disappointedly awakened, enlivened by the hour, kindled by a novel figure of man, fretful for a dash of imprudence. This Mrs. Radnor should be the one to second her very innocent turn for a galopade ; her own position allowed of any little diverting jig or reel, or plunge in a bath—she required it, for the domestic Jacob Blathenoy was a dry chip : proved such, without a day's variation during the whole of the ten wedded months. Nataly gratified her spoken wish. Dartrey Fenellan bowed to the lady, and she withdrew him, seeing composedly that other and greater ladies had the wish ungratified. Their hus-

bands were not so rich as hers, and their complexions would hardly have pleased the handsome brown-faced officer so well.

Banquet, equal to a blast of trumpet, was the detaining word for the multitude. It circulated, one knows not how. Eloquent as the whiffs to the sniffs (and nowhere is eloquence to match it, when the latter are sharpened from within to without), the word was very soon over the field. Mr. Carling may have helped; he had it from Fenellan; and he was among the principal groups, claiming or making acquaintances, as a lawyer should do. The Concert was complementarily a topic: Durandarte divine!—did not everybody think so? Everybody did, in default of a term for overtopping it. Our language is poor at hyperbole; our voices are stronger. Gestures and heaven-sent eyeballs invoke to display the ineffable. Where was Durandarte now? Gone; already gone; off with the Luciani for evening engagements; he came simply to oblige his dear friend Mr. Radnor. Cheque fifty guineas: hardly more on both sides than an exchange of smiles.

Ah, these merchant-princes! What of Mr. Radnor's amateur instrumentalists? Amateurs, they are not to be named: perfect musicians. Mr. Radnor is the perfection of a host. Yes, yes; Mrs. Radnor; Miss Radnor too: delicious voices; but what is it about Mr. Radnor so captivating! He is not quite English, yet he is not at all foreign. Is he very adventurous in business, as they say?

"Soundest head in the City of London," Mr. Blathenoy remarked.

Sir Rodwell Blachington gave his nod.

The crowd interjected, half-sighing. We ought to be proud of such a man! Perhaps we are a trifle exaggerating, says its heart. But that we are wholly grateful to him, is a distinct conclusion. And he *may* be one of the great men of his time: he has a quite individual style of dress.

Lady Rodwell Blachington observed to Colney Durance: "Mr. Radnor bids fair to become the idol of the English people."

"If he can prove himself to be sufficiently the dupe of the English people," said Colney.

"Idol—dupe?" interjected Sir Rodwell,

and his eyebrows fixed at the perch of Colney's famous 'national interrogation' over vacancy of understanding, as if from the pull of a string. He had his audience with him; and the satirist had nothing but his inner gush of acids at sight of a planted barb.

Colney was asked to explain. He never explained. He performed a series of astonishing leaps, like the branchy baboon above the traveller's head in the tropical forest, and led them into the trap they assisted him to prepare for them. "No humour, do you say? The English have no humour?" a nephew of Lady Blachington's inquired of him, with polite pugnacity, and was cordially assured, that "he vindicated them."

"And *Altruistic!* another specimen of the modern coinage," a classical Church dignitary, in grammarian disgust, remarked to a lady, as they passed.

Colney pricked-up his ears. It struck him that he might fish for suggestions in aid of the Grand Argument before the Elders of the Court of Japan. Dr. Wardan, whose recognition he could claim, stated to him, that

the lady and he were enumerating words of a doubtfully legitimate quality now being inflicted upon the language.

“The slang from below is perhaps preferable?” said Colney.

“As little—less.”

“But a pirate-tongue, cut-off from its roots, must continue to practise piracy, surely, or else take re-inforcements in slang, otherwise it is inexpressive of new ideas.”

“Possibly the new ideas are best expressed in slang.”

“If insular. They will consequently be incommunicable to foreigners. You would, then, have us be trading with tokens instead a precious currency? Yet I cannot perceive the advantage of letting our ideas be clothed so racy of the obscener soil; considering the pretensions of the English language to become the universal. If we refuse additions from above, they force themselves on us from below.”

Dr. Wardan liked the frame of the observations, disliked the substance.

“One is to understand that the English

language has these pretensions?" he said:— he minced in his manner, after the well-known mortar-board and tassel type; the mouthing of a petrification: clearly useless to the pleadings of the patriotic Dr. Bouthoin and his curate.

He gave no grip to Colney, who groaned at cheap Donnish sarcasm, and let him go, after dealing him a hard pellet or two in a cracker-covering.

There was Victor all over the field netting his ephemeræ! And he who feeds on them, to pay a price for their congratulations and flatteries, he is one of them himself!

Nesta came tripping from the Rev. Septimus Barnby. "Dear Mr. Durance, where is Captain Dartrey?"

Mrs. Blathenoy had just conducted her husband through a crowd, for an introduction of him to Captain Dartrey. That was perceptible.

Dudley Sowerby followed Nesta closely: he struck across the path of the Rev. Septimus: again he had the hollow of her ear at disposal.

“Mr. Radnor was excellent. He does everything consummately : really, we are all sensible of it. I am. He must lead us in a symphony. These light ‘champagne overtures’ of French composers, as Mr. Fenellan calls them, do not bring out his whole ability :—*Zampa*, *Le pré aux-clercs*, *Masaniello*, and the like.”

“Your duet together went well.”

“Thanks to you—to you. You kept us together.”

“Papa was the runaway or strain-the-leash, if there was one.”

“He is impetuous, he is so fervent. But, Miss Radnor, I could not be the runaway—with you . . . with you at the piano. Indeed, I . . . shall we stroll down ? I love the lake.”

“You will hear the bell for your cold dinner very soon.”

“I am not hungry. I would so much rather talk—hear you. But you are hungry ? You have been singing : twice : three times ! Opera singers, they say, eat hot suppers ; they drink stout. And I never heard your voice more effective. Yours is a voice that

. . . something of the feeling one has in hearing cathedral voices: carry one up. I remember, in Dresden, once, a Fräulein Kühnstreich, a prodigy, very young, considering her accomplishments. But it was not the same."

Nesta wondered at Dartrey Fenellan for staying so long with Mr. and Mrs. Blathenoy.

"Ah, Mr. Sowerby, if I am to have flattery, I cannot take it as a milliner's dummy figure wears the beautiful dress; I must point out my view of some of my merits."

"Oh! do, I beg, Miss . . . You have a Christian name: and I too: and once . . . not Mr. Sowerby: yes, it was Dudley!"

"Quite accidentally, and a world of pardons entreated."

"And Dudley begged Dudley might be Dudley always!"

He was deepening to the Barmby intonation—apparently Cupid's; but a shade more airily Pagan, not so fearfully clerical.

Her father had withdrawn Dartrey Fenellan from Mr. and Mrs. Blathenoy. Dr. Schlesien was bowing with Dartrey.

“And if Durandarte would only—but you are one with Miss Graves to depreciate my Durandarte, in favour of the more classical Jachimo; whom we all admire; but you shall be just,” said she, and she pouted. She had seen her father plant Dartrey Fenellan in the midst of a group of City gentlemen.

Simeon touched among them to pluck at his brother. He had not a chance; he retired, and swam into the salmon-net of seductive Mrs. Blathenoy’s broad bright smile.

“It’s a matter of mines, and they’re hovering in the attitude of the query, like corkscrews over a bottle, profoundly indifferent to blood-relationship,” he said to her.

“Pray, stay and be consoled by me,” said the fair young woman. “You are to point me out all the distinguished people. Is it true, that your brother has left the army?”

“Dartrey no longer wears the red. Here comes Colonel Corfe, who does. England has her army still!”

“His wife persuaded him?”

“You see he is wearing the black.”

“For her? How very very sad! Tell me—what a funnily-dressed woman meeting that gentleman!”

“Hush—a friend of the warrior. Splendid weather, Colonel Corfe.”

“Superb toilettes!” The colonel eyed Mrs. Blathenoy dilatingly, advanced, bowed, and opened the siege.

She decided a calculation upon his age, made a wall of it, smilingly agreed with his encomium of the Concert, and toned her voice to Fenellan’s comprehension: “Did it occur recently?”

“Months; in Africa; I haven’t the date.”

“Such numbers of people one would wish to know! Who are those ladies holding a Court, where Mr. Radnor is?”

“Lady Carmine, Lady Swanage—if it is your wish?” interposed the colonel.

She dealt him a forgiving smile. “And that pleasant-looking old gentleman?”

Colonel Corfe drew-up. Fenellan said: “Are we veterans at forty or so?”

“Well, it’s the romance, perhaps!” She raised her shoulders.

The colonel's intelligence ran a dog's nose for a lady's interjections. "The romance? . . . at forty, fifty? gone? Miss Julinks, the great heiress and a beauty, has chosen him over the heads of all the young men of his time. Cranmer Lotsdale. Most romantic history!"

"She's in love with that, I suppose."

"Now you direct my attention to him," said Fenellan, "the writing of the romantic history *has* made the texture look a trifle thready. You have a terrible eye."

It was thrown to where the person stood who had first within a few minutes helped her to form critical estimates of men, more consciously to read them.

"Your brother stays in England?"

"The fear is, that he's off again."

"Annoying for you. If I had a brother, I would not let him go."

"How would you detain him?"

"Locks and bolts, clock wrong, hands and arms, kneeling—the fourth act of the Huguenots!"

"He went by way of the window, I think. But that was a lover."

“Oh! well!” she flushed. She did not hear the neglected and astonished colonel speak, and she sought diversion in saying to Fenellan: “So many people of distinction are assembled here to day! Tell me, who is that pompous gentleman, who holds his arms up doubled, as he walks?”

“Like flappers of a penguin: and advances in jerks: he is head of the great Firm of Quatley Brothers: Sir Abraham: finances or farms one of the South American Republics: we call him, Pride of Port. He consumes it and he presents it.”

“And who is that little man, who stops everybody?”

“People of distinction indeed! That little man—is your upper lip underrateing him? . . . When a lady’s lip is erratically disdainful, it suggests a misuse of a copious treasury, deserving to be mulcted, punished—how?—who can say?—that little man, now that little man, with a lift of his little finger, could convulse the Bacon Market!”

Mrs. Blathenoy shook. Hearing Colonel Corfe exclaim: “Bacon Market!” she let

fly a peal. Then she turned to a fresh satellite, a round and a ruddy, 'at her service ever,' Mr. Beaves Urmsing, and repeated Fenellan's words. He, in unfeigned wonderment at such unsuspected powers, cried: "Dear me!" and stared at the little man, making the pretty lady's face a twinkling dew.

He had missed the Concert. Was it first-rate? Ecstasy answered in the female voice.

"Hem'd fool I am to keep appointments!" he muttered.

She reproved him: "Fie, Mr. Urmsing: it's the making of them, not the keeping!"

"Ah, my dear ma'am, if I'd had Blathey's luck when he made a certain appointment. And he was not so much older than me? The old ones get the prizes!"

Mr. Beaves Urmsing prompted Colonel Corfe to laugh in triumph. The colonel's eyebrows were up in fixity over sleepy lids. He brightened to propose the conducting of the pretty woman to the banquet.

"We shall see them going in," said she. "Mr. Radnor has a French cook, who does wonders. But I heard him asking for Mr.

Beaves Urmsing. I'm sure he expected *The Marigolds* at his Concert."

"Anything to oblige the company," said the rustic ready chorister, clearing his throat.

The lady's feet were bent in the direction of a grassy knoll, where sunflowers, tulips, dahlias, peonies, of the sex eclipsed at a distance its roses and lilies. Fenellan saw Dartrey, still a centre of the merchantmen, strolling thither.

"And do you know, your brother is good enough to dine with us next week, Thursday, down here," she murmured. "I could venture to command?—if you are not induced."

"Whichever word applies to a faithful subject."

"I do so wish your brother had not left the army!"

"You have one son of Mars."

Her eyes took the colonel up to cast him down: he was not the antidote. She said to him: "Luciani's voice wears better than her figure."

The colonel replied: "I remember," and

corrected himself, "at Eton, in jackets : she was not so particularly slim ; never knew how to dress. You beat Italians there ! She moved one as a youngster."

"Eton boys are so susceptible !"

"Why, hulloa, don't I remember her coming out!—and do you mean to tell me," Mr. Beaves Urmsing brutally addressed the colonel, "that you were at Eton when why, what age do you give the poor woman, then !" He bellowed, "Eh ?" as it were a bull crowing.

The colonel retreated to one of his defensive corners. "I am not aware that I meant to tell you anything."

Mr. Beaves Urmsing turned square-breasted on Fenellan : "Fellow's a born donkey !"

"And the mother lived ?" said Fenellan.

Mr. Beaves Urmsing puffed with wrath at the fellow.

Five minutes later, in the midst of the group surrounding and felicitating Victor, he had sight of Fenellan conversing with fair ones, and it struck a light in him ; he went three steps backward, with shouts. "Dam

funny fellow ! eh ? who is he ? I must have that man at my table. Worth fifty Colonel Jackasses ! And I've got a son in the Guards : and as much laugh in him, *he's* got, as a bladder. But we'll make a party, eh, Radnor ? with that friend o' yours. Dam funny fellow ! and precious little of it going on now among the young lot. They're for seeing ghosts and gaping their jaws ; all for the quavers instead of the capers."

He sounded and thrummed his roguish fling-off for the capers. A second glimpse of Fenellan agitated the anecdote, as he called it, seizing Victor's arm, to have him out of earshot of the ladies. Delivery, not without its throes, was accomplished, but imperfectly, owing to sympathetic convulsions, under which Mr. Beaves Urmsing's countenance was crinkled of many colours, as we see the Spring rhubarb-leaf. Unable to repeat the brevity of Fenellan's rejoinder, he expatiated on it to convey it, swearing that it was the kind of thing done in the old days, when men were witty dogs :—pat ! and pat back ! as in the pantomime."

“Repartee!” said Victor. “He has it. You shall know him. You’re the man for him.”

“He for me, that he is!—‘Hope the mother’s doing well? My card:’—eh? Grave as an owl! Look, there goes the donkey, lady to right and left, all ears for him—ha! ha! I must have another turn with your friend. ‘Mother lived, did she?’ Dam funny fellow, all of the olden time! And a dinner, bachelor dinner, six of us, at my place, next week, say Wednesday, half-past six, for a long evening—flowing bowl—eh, shall it be?”

Nesta came looking to find her Captain Dartrey.

Mr. Beaves Urmsing grew courtly of the olden time. He spied Colonel Corfe anew, and “Donkey!” rose to split the roar at his mouth, and full of his anecdote, he pursued some congenial acquaintances, crying to his host: “Wednesday, mind! eh? by George, your friend’s gizzarded me for the day!”

Plumped with the rich red stream of life, this last of the squires of old England thumped along among the guests, a very tuning-fork

to keep them at their pitch of enthusiasm. He encountered Mr. Caddis, and it was an encounter. Mr. Caddis represented his political opinions; but here was this cur of a Caddis whineing his niminy note from his piminy nob, when he was asked for his hearty echo of the praises of this jolly good fellow come to waken the neighbourhood, to be a blessing, a blazing hearth, a fall of manna:—and thank the Lord for him, you desert-dog! “He’s a merchant prince, and he’s a prince of a man, if you’re for titles. Eh? you ‘assent to my encomiums.’ You’ll be calling me Mr. Speaker next. Hang me, Caddis, if those Parliamentary benches of yours aren’t freezing you from your seat up, and have got to your jaw—my belief!”

Mr. Caddis was left reflecting, that we have, in the dispensations of Providence, when we have a seat, to submit to castigations from butcherly men unaccountably commissioned to solidify the seat. He could have preached a discourse upon Success, to quiet the discontentment of the unseated. And our world of seats oddly gained, quaintly occupied, mali-

ciously beset, insensately envied, needs the discourse. But it was not delivered, else would it have been here written down without mercy, as a medical prescript, one of the grand specifics. He met Victor, and, between his dread of him and the counsels of a position subject to stripes, he was a genial thaw. Victor beamed ; for Mr. Caddis had previously stood eminent as an iceberg of the Lakelands' party. Mr. Inchling and Mr. Caddis were introduced. The former in Commerce, the latter in Politics, their sustaining boast was, the being our stable Englishmen ; and at once, with cousinly minds, they fell to chatting upon the nothings agreeably and seriously. Colney Durance forsook a set of ladies for fatter prey, and listened to them. What he said, Victor did not hear. The effect was always to be seen, with Inchling under Colney. Fenellan did better service, really good service.

Nataly played the heroine she was at heart. Why think of her as having to act a character ! Twice had Carling that afternoon, indirectly and directly, stated Mrs.

Burman to be near the end we crape a natural, a defensible, satisfaction to hear of:—not wishing it:—poor woman!—but pardonably, before man and all the angels, wishing, praying for the beloved one to enter into her earthly peace by the agency of the other's exit into her heavenly.

Fenellan and Colney came together, and said a word apiece of their friend.

“In his element! The dear old boy has the look of a gold-fish, king of his globe.”

“The dear old boy has to me the look of a pot on the fire, with a loose lid.”

I may have the summons from Themison to-morrow, Victor thought. The success of the day was a wine that rocked the soberest of thoughts. For, strange to confess, ever since the fall on London Bridge, his heart, influenced in some degree by Nataly's depression perhaps, had been shadowed by doubts of his infallible instinct for success. Here, at a stroke, and before entering the house, he had the whole neighbourhood about him: he could feel that he and Nataly stood in the minds of the worthy people variously

with the brightness if not with the warmth distinguishable in the bosom of Beaves Urmsing—the idea of whom gave Lakelands an immediate hearth-glow.

Armandine was thirteen minutes, by his watch, behind the time she had named. Small blame to her. He excused her to Lady Carmine, Lady Swanage, Lady Blachington, Mrs. Fanning, Sir Abraham Quatley, Mr. Danny (of Bacon fame) and the rest of the group surrounding Nataly on the mound leftward of the white terraces descending to the lake; where she stood beating her foot fretfully at the word brought by Nesta, that Dartrey Fenellan had departed. It was her sunshine departed. But she went through her task of conversing amiably. Colney, for a wonder, consented to be useful in assisting Fenellan to relate stories of French Cooks; which were, like the Royal Hanoverian oyster, of an age for offering acceptable flavour to English hearers. Nesta drew her mother's attention to Priscilla Graves and Skepsey; the latter bending head and assenting. Nataly spoke of the charm of Priscilla's

voice that day, in her duet with the Rev. Septimus. Mr. Pempton looked; he saw that Priscilla was proselytizing. She was perfection to him but for one blotting thing. With grief on his eyelids, he said to Nataly or to himself: "Meat!"

"Dear friend, don't ride your hobby *over* us," she replied.

"But it's with that object they mount it," said Victor.

The greater ladies of the assembly were quite ready to accuse the sections, down to the individuals, of the social English (reserving our elect) of an itch to be tyrants.

Colney was apologizing for them, with his lash: "It's merely the sensible effect of a want of polish of the surface when they rub together."

And he heard Carling exclaim to Victor: "How comes the fellow here!"

Skepsey had rushed across an open space to intercept a leisurely progressive man, whose hat was of the shape Victor knew; and the man wore the known black gaiters. In appearance, he had the likeness of a fallen parson.

Carling and Victor crossed looks, that were questions carrying their answers.

Nataly's eyes followed Victor's. "Who is the man?" she said; and she got no reply beyond a perky sparkle in his gaze.

Others were noticing the man, who was trying to pass by Skepsey, now on his right side, now on his left.

"There'll be no stopping him," Carling said, and he slipped to the rear.

At this juncture, Armandine's mellow bell proclaimed her readiness.

Victor rubbed the back of his head. Nataly asked him: "Dear, is it that man?"

He nodded scantily: "Expected, expected. I think we have our summons from Armandine. One moment—poor soul! poor soul! Lady Carmine—Sir Abraham Quatley. Will you lead? Lady Blachington, I secure you. One moment."

He directed Nataly to pair a few of the guests; he hurried down the slope of sward.

Nataly applied to Colney Durance. "Do you know the man?—is it that man?"

Colney rejoined: "The man's name is Jarniman."

Armandine's bell swung melodiously. The guests had grouped, thickening for the stream to procession. Mrs. Blathenoy claimed Fenellan; she requested him to tell her whether he had known Mrs. Victor Radnor many years. She mused. "You like her?"

"One likes one's dearest of friends among women, does one not?"

The lady nodded to his response. "And your brother?"

"Dartrey is devoted to her."

"I am sure," said she, "your brother is a chivalrous gentleman. I like her too." She came to her sentiment through the sentiment of the chivalrous gentleman. Sinking from it, she remarked that Mr. Radnor was handsome still. Fenellan commended the subject to her, as one to discourse of when she met Dartrey. A smell of a trap-hatch half-open, afflicted and sharpened him. It was Blathenoy's breath: husbands of young wives do these villanies, for the sake of showing their knowledge. Fenellan forbore to praise Mrs. Victor: he laid his colours on Dartrey. The lady gave ear till she reddened. He meant

no harm, meant nothing but good ; and he was lighting the most destructive of our lower fires.

Visibly, that man Jarniman was disposed of with ease. As in the street-theatres of crowing Punch, distance enlisted pantomime to do the effective part of the speeches. Jarniman's hat was off, he stood bent, he delivered his message. He was handed over to Skepsey's care for the receiving of meat and drink. Victor returned ; he had Lady Blachington's hand on his arm ; he was all hers, and in the heart of his company of guests at the same time. Eyes that had read him closely for years, were unable to spell a definite signification on his face, below the overflowing happiness of the hospitable man among contented guests. He had in fact something within to enliven him ; and that was the more than suspicion, amounting to an odour of certainty, that Armandine intended one of her grand surprises for her master, and for the hundred and fifty or so to be seated at her tables in the unwarmed house of Lakelands.

CHAPTER VII.

CONCERNS THE INTRUSION OF JARNIMAN.

ARMANDINE did her wonders. There is not in the wide range of the Muses a more responsive instrument than man to his marvellous cook ; and if his notes were but as flowing as his pedals are zealous, we should be carried on the tale of the enthusiasm she awakened, away from the rutted highroad, where History now thinks of tightening her girdle for an accelerated pace.

The wonders were done : one hundred and seventy guests plenteously fed at tables across the great Concert Hall, down a length of the conservatory-glass, on soups, fish, meats, and the kitchen-garden, under play of creative sauces, all in the persuasive steam of savouriness ; every dish, one may say, ad-

vancing, curtseying, swimming to be your partner, instead of passively submitting to the eye of appetite, consenting to the teeth, as that rather melancholy procession of the cold, resembling established spinsters thrice-corseted in decorum, will appear to do. Whether Armandine had the thought or that she simply acted in conformity with a French-woman's direct good sense, we do require to smell a sort of animation in the meats we consume. . We are still perhaps traceably related to the Adamite old-youngster just on his legs, who betrayed at every turn his Darwinian beginnings, and relished a palpitating unwillingness in the thing refreshing him; only we young-oldsters cherish the milder taste for willingness, with a throb of the vanquished in it. And a seeming of that we get from the warm roast. The banquet to be fervently remembered, should smoke, should send out a breath to meet us. Victor's crowded saloon-carriage was one voice of eulogy, to raise Armandine high as the finale rockets bursting over Wrensham Station at the start Londonward. How had she

managed? We foolishly question the arts of magicians.

Mr. Pempton was an apparent dissentient, as the man must be who is half a century ahead of his fellows in humaneness, and saddened by the display of slaughtered herds and their devourers. He had picked out his vegetable and farinaceous morsels, wherever he could get them uncontaminated; enough for sustenance; and the utmost he could show was, that he did not complain. When mounted and ridden by the satirist, in wrath at him for systematically feasting the pride of the martyr on the maceration of his animal part, he put on his martyr's pride, which assumed a perfect contentment in the critical depreciation of opposing systems: he was drawn to state, as he had often done, that he considered our animal part shamefully and dangerously overnourished, and that much of the immorality of the world was due to the present excessive indulgence in meats. "Not in drink?" Miss Graves inquired. "No," he said boldly; "not equally; meats are more insidious. I say nothing of taking life—of

fattening for that express purpose: diseases of animals: bad blood made: cruelty superinduced:—it will be seen to be, it will be looked back on, as a form of, a second stage of, cannibalism. Let that pass. I say, that for excess in drinking, the penalty is paid instantly, or at least on the morrow.”

“Paid by the drunkard’s wife, you should say.”

“Whereas intemperance in eating, corrupts constitutionally, more spiritually vitiates, *we* think: on the whole, gluttony is the least-generous of the vices.”

Colney lured Mr. Pempton through a quagmire of the vices to declare, that it brutalized; and stammeringly to adopt the suggestion, that our breeding of English ladies—those lights of the civilized world—can hardly go with a feeding upon flesh of beasts. Priscilla regretted that champagne should have to be pleaded in excuse of impertinences to her sex. They were both combative, nibbled for epigram, edged to inflict wounds; and they were set to shudder openly at one another’s practises; they might have exposed to Colney

which of the two maniacal sections of his English had the vaster conceit of superiority in purity; they were baring themselves, as it were with a garment flung-off at each retort. He reproached them for undermining their countrymen; whose Falstaff panics demanded blood of animals to restore them; and their periods of bragging, that they should brandify their wits to imagine themselves Vikings.

Nataly interposed. She was vexed with him. He let his eyelids drop: but the occasion for showing the prickliness of the bristly social English, could not be resisted. Dr. Peter Yatt was tricked to confess, that small annoyances were, in his experience, powerful on the human frame; and Dr. John Cormyn was very neatly brought round to assure him he was mistaken if he supposed the homœopathic doctor who smoked was exercising a destructive influence on the efficacy of the infinitesimal doses he prescribed; Dr. Yatt chuckled a laugh at globules; Dr. Cormyn at patients treated as horses; while Mr. Catkin was brought to praise the smoke of tobacco as

our sanctuary from the sex ; and Mr. Peridon quietly denied, that the taking of it into his nostrils from the puffs of his friend caused him sad silences. Nesta flew to protect the admirer of her beloved Louise. Her subsiding young excitement of the day set her doating on that moony melancholy in Mr. Peridon. No one could understand the grounds for Colney's more than usual waspishness. He trotted out the fulgent and tonal Church of the Rev. Septimus ; the skeleton of worship, so truly showing the spirit, in that of Dudley Sowerby's family ; maliciously admiring both ; and he had a spar with Fenellan, ending in a snarl and a shout. Victor said to him : " Yes, here, as much as you like, old Colney, but I tell you, you've staggered that poor woman Lady Blachington to-day, and her husband too ; and I don't know how many besides. What the pleasure of it can be, I can't guess."

" Nor I," said Fenellan, " but I'll own I feel envious ; like the girl among a family of boys I knew, who were all of them starved in their infancy by a miserly father, that gave them barely a bit of Graves to eat and not a

drop of Pempton to drink; and on the afternoon of his funeral, I found them in the drawing-room, four lank fellows, heels up, walking on their hands, from long practice; and the girl informed me, that her brothers were able so to send the little blood they had in their bodies to their brains, and always felt quite cheerful for it, happy, and empowered to deal with the problems of the universe; as they couldn't on their legs; but she, poor thing, was forbidden to do the same! And I'm like her. I care for decorum too much to get the brain to act on Colney's behaviour; but I see it enraptures him and may be comprehensible to the topsy-turvey."

Victor rubbed hands. It was he who filled Colney's bag of satiric spite. In addition to the downright lunacy of the courting of country society, by means of the cajolements witnessed this day, a suspicion that Victor was wearing a false face over the signification of Jarniman's visit and meant to deceive the trustful and too-devoted loving woman he seemed bound to wreck, irritated the best

of his nature. He had a resolve to pass an hour with the couple, and speak and insist on hearing plain words before the night had ended. But Fenellan took it out of him. Victor's show of a perfect contentment emulating Pempton's, incited Colney to some of his cunning rapier-thrusts with his dancing adversary; and the heat which is planted in us for the composition of those cool epigrams, will not allow plain words to follow. Or, handing him over to the police of the Philistines, you may put it, that a habit of assorting spices will render an earnest simplicity distasteful. He was invited by Nataly to come home with them; her wish for his presence, besides personal, was moved by an intuition, that his counsel might specially benefit them. He shrugged; he said he had work at his chambers.

"Work!" Victor ejaculated: he never could reach to a right comprehension of labour, in regard to the very unremunerative occupation of literature. Colney he did not want, and he let him go, as Nataly noticed, without a sign of the reluctance he showed

when the others, including Fenellan, excused themselves.

"So! we're alone?" he said, when the door of the hall had closed on them. He kept Nesta talking of the success of the day until she, observing her mother's look, simulated the setting-in of a frenzied yawn. She was kissed, and she tripped to her bed.

"Now we are alone," Nataly said.

"Well, dear, and the day was, you must own . . ." he sought to trifle with her heavy voice; but she recalled him: "Victor!" and the naked anguish in her cry of his name was like a foreign world threatening the one he filled.

"Ah, yes; that man, that Jarniman. You saw him, I remember. You recollected him?—stouter than he was. In her service ever since. Well, a little drop of bitter, perhaps: no harm, tonic."

"Victor, is she very ill?"

"My love, don't feel at your side: she is ill, ill, not the extreme case: not yet: old and ill. I told Skepsey to give the man refreshment: he had to do his errand."

“What? why did he come?”

“Curious; he made acquaintance with Skepsey, and appears to have outwitted poor Skepsey, as far as I see it. But if that woman thinks of intimidating me now!—” His eyes brightened; he had sprung from evasions. “Living in flagrant sin, she says: you and I! She will not have it; warns me. Heard this day at noon of company at Lakelands. Jarniman off at once. Are to live in obscurity;—you and I! if together! Dictates from her death-bed—I suppose her death-bed.”

“Dearest,” Nataly pressed hand on her left breast, “may we not think that she may be right?”

“An outrageous tyranny of a decrepit woman naming herself wife when she is only a limpet of vitality, with drugs for blood, hanging-on to blast the healthy and vigorous! I remember old Colney’s once, in old days, calling that kind of marriage a sarcophagus. It was to me. There I lay—see myself lying! wasting! Think what you can good of her, by all means. From her bed! de-

spatches that Jarniman to me from her bedside, with the word, that she cannot in her conscience allow—what imposition was it I practised? . . . flagrant sin?—it would have been an infinitely viler. . . . She is the cause of suffering enough: I bear no more from her; I've come to the limit. She has heard of Lakelands: she has taken one of her hatreds to the place. She might have written, might have sent me a gentleman, privately. No: it must be done in dramatic style—for effect: her confidential—lawyer?—doctor?—butler! Perhaps to frighten me:—the boy she knew, and—poor soul! I don't mean to abuse her: but such conduct as this is downright brutal. I laugh at it, I snap my fingers. I can afford to despise it. Only I do say it deserves to be called abominable.”

“Victor, has she used a threat?”

“Am I brought to listen to any of her threats!—Funny thing, I'm certain that woman never can think of me except as the boy she knew. I saw her first when she was first a widow. She would keep talking to

me of the seductions of the metropolis—kept informing me I was a young man . . . shaking her head. I've told you. She—well, I know we are mixtures, women as well as men. I can, I hope, grant the same—I believe I can—allowances to women as to men; we are poor creatures, all of us—in one sense: though I won't give Colney his footing; there's a better way of reading us. I hold fast to Nature. No violation of Nature, my good Colney! We can live the lives of noble creatures; and I say that happiness was meant for us:—just as, when you sit down to your dinner, you must do it cheerfully, and you make good blood: otherwise all's wrong. There's the right answer to Colney! But when a woman like that . . . and marries a boy: well, twenty-one—not quite that: and an innocent, a positive innocent—it may seem incredible, after a term of school-life: it was a fact: I can hardly understand it myself when I look back. Marries him! And then sets to work to persecute him, because he has blood in his veins, because he worships beauty; because he seeks

a real marriage, a real mate. And, I say it!—let the world take its own view, the world is wrong!—because he preferred a virtuous life to the kind of life she would, she must—why, necessarily!—have driven him to, with a mummy's grain of nature in his body. And I am made of flesh, I admit it."

"Victor, dearest, her threat concerns only your living at Lakelands."

"Pray, don't speak excitedly, my love," he replied to the woman whose tones had been subdued to scarce more than waver. "You see how I meet it: water off a duck's back or Indian solar beams on the skin of a Hindoo! I despise it—hardly worth contempt;—But, come: our day was a good one. Fenellan worked well. Old Colney was Colney Durance, of course. He did no real mischief."

"And you will not determine to enter Lakelands—not yet, dear?" said Nataly.

"My own girl, leave it all to me."

"But, Victor, I must, must know."

"See the case. You have lots of courage. We can't withdraw. Her intention is mis-

chief. I believe the woman keeps herself alive for it : we've given her another lease ! —though it can only be for a very short time ; Themison is precise ; Carling too. If we hold back—I have great faith in Themison—the woman's breath on us is confirmed. We go down, then ; complete the furnishing, quite leisurely ; accept—listen—accept one or two invitations : impossible to refuse !—but they are accepted !—and we defy her :—a crazy old creature ; imagines herself the wife of the ex-Premier, widow of Prince Le Boo, engaged to the Chinese Ambassador, et cætera. Leave the tussle with that woman to me. No, we don't repeat the error of Craye Farm and Creckholt. And here we have stout friends. Not to speak of Beaves Urmsing : a picture of Old Christmas England ! You took to him ?—must have taken to Beaves Urmsing ! The Marigolds ! And Sir Rodwell and Lady Blachington are altogether above the mark of Sir Humphrey and Lady Pottil, and those half and half Mountneys. There's a warm centre of home in Lakelands. But I know my Nataly : she

is thinking of our girl. Here is the plan : We stand our ground : my dear soul won't forsake me : only there's the thought of Fredi, in the event . . . improbable enough. I lift Fredi out of the atmosphere awhile ; she goes to my cousins the Duvidney ladies."

Nataly was hit by a shot. "Can you imagine it, Victor?"

"Regard it as done."

"They will surely decline!"

"Their feeling for General Radnor is a worship."

"All the more . . . ?"

"The son inherits it. He goes to them personally. Have you ever known me personally fail? Fredi stays at Moorsedge for a month or two. Dorothea and Virginia Duvidney will give her a taste of a new society ; good for the girl. All these little shiftings can be turned to good. Meantime, I say, we stand our ground : but you are not to be worried ; for though we have gone too far to recede, we need not and we will not make the entry into Lakelands until—you know : that is, auspiciously, to suit you in

every way. Thus I provide to meet contingencies. What one may really fancy is, that the woman did but threaten. There's her point of view to be considered: silly, crazy; but one sees it. We are not sure that she struck a blow at Craye or Creckholt. I wonder she never wrote. She was frightened, when she came to manage her property, of signing her name to anything. Absurd, that sending of Jarniman! However, it's her move; we make a corresponding disposition of our chessmen."

"And I am to lose my Nesta for a month?" Nataly said, after catching here and there at the fitful gleams of truce or comfort dropped from his words. And simultaneously, the reproach of her mind to her nature for again and so constantly yielding to the domination of his initiative—unable to find the words, even the ideas, to withstand him,—brought big tears. Angry at herself both for the internal feebleness and the exhibition of it, she blinked and begged excuse. There might be nothing that should call her to resist him. She could not do much worse than she had

done to-day. The reflection, that to-day she had been actually sustained by the expectation of a death to come, diminished her estimate of to-morrow's burden on her endurance, in making her seem a less criminal woman, who would have no such expectation:—which was virtually a stab at a fellow creature's future. Her head was acute to work in the direction of the casuistries and the sensational webs and films. Facing Victor, it was a block.

But the thought came: how could she meet those people about Lakelands, without support of the recent guilty whispers! She said coldly, her heart shaking her: "You think there has been a recovery?"

"Invalids are up and down. They are—well, no; I should think she dreads the . . ." he kept "surgeon" out of hearing. "Or else she means this for the final stroke: 'though I'm lying here, I can still make him feel.' That, or—poor woman—she has her notions of right and wrong."

"Could we not now travel for a few weeks, Victor?"

“Certainly, dear; we will, after we have kept our engagements to dine—I accepted—with the Blathenoys, the Blachingtons, Beaves Urmsing.”

Nataly’s vision of the peaceful lost little dairy cottage swelled to brilliance, like the large tear at the fall; darkening under her present effort to comprehend the necessity it was for him to mix and be foremost with the world. Unable to grasp it perfectly in mind, her compassionate love embraced it: she blamed herself, for being the obstruction to him.

“Very well,” she said on a sigh. “Then we shall not have to let our girl go from us?”

“Just a few weeks. In the middle of dinner, I scribbled a telegram to the Duvidneys, for Skepsey to take.”

“Speaking of Nesta?”

“Of my coming to-morrow. They won’t stop me. I dine with them, sleep at the Wells; hotel for a night. We are to be separated for a night.”

She laid her hand in his and gave him a

passing view of her face: "For two, dear. I am . . . that man's visit—rather shaken: I shall have a better chance of sleeping if I know I am not disturbing you."

She was firm; and they kissed and parted. Each had an unphrased speculation upon the power of Mrs. Burman to put division between them.

CHAPTER VIII.

TREATS OF THE LADIES' LAPDOG TASSO FOR
AN INSTANCE OF MOMENTOUS EFFECTS
PRODUCED BY VERY MINOR CAUSES.

THE maiden ladies Dorothea and Virginia Duvidney were thin-sweet old-fashioned grey gentlewomen, demurely conscious of their excellence and awake to the temptation in the consciousness, who imposed a certain reflex primness on the lips of the world when addressing them or when alluding to them. For their appearance was picturesque of the ancestral time, and their ideas and scrupulousness of delivery suggested the belated in ripeness ; orchard apples under a snow-storm ; or any image that will ceremoniously convey the mind's profound appreciation together with the tooth's panic dread of tartness. They

were by no means tart ; only, as you know, the tooth is apprehensively nervous ; an uninviting sign will set it on edge. Even the pen which would sketch them has a spell on it and must don its coat of office, walk the liveried footman behind them.

Their wealth, their deeds of charity, their modesty, their built grey locks, their high repute ; a "Chippendale elegance" in a quaintly formal correctness, that they had, as Colney Durance called it ; gave them some queenliness, and allowed them to claim the ear as an oracle and banish rebellious argument. Intuitive knowledge, assisted by the Rev. Stuart Rem and the Rev. Abram Posterley, enabled them to pronounce upon men and things ; not without effect ; their country owned it ; the foreigner beheld it. Nor were they corrupted by the servility of the surrounding ear. They were good women, striving to be humbly good. They might, for all the little errors they nightly unrolled to their perceptions, have stood before the world for a study in the white of our humanity. And this may be but a washed wall, it is true : revolutionary

sceptics are measuring the depths of it. But the hue refreshes, the world admires; and we know it an object of aim to the bettermost of the wealthy. If, happily, complacent circumstances have lifted us to the clean paved platform out of grip of puddled clay and bespattering wheeltracks, we get our chance of coming to it.

Possessing, for example, nine thousand pounds per annum in Consols, and not expending the whole of it upon our luxuries, we are, without further privation, near to kindling the world's enthusiasm for whiteness. Yet there, too, we find, that character has its problems to solve; there are shades in salt. We must be charitable, but we should be just; we give to the poor of the land, but we are eminently the friends of our servants; duty to mankind diverts us not from the love we bear to our dog; and with a pathetic sorrow for sin, we discard it from sight and hearing. We *hate dirt*. Having said so much, having shown it, by sealing the mouth of Mr. Stuart Rem and iceing the veins of Mr. Abram Posterley, in relation to a dreadful

public case and a melancholy private, we have a pleased sense of entry into the world's ideal.

At the same time, we protest our unworthiness. Acknowledging that they were not purely spotless, these ladies genuinely took the tiny fly-spot for a spur to purification; and they viewed it as a patch to raise in relief their goodness. They gazed on it, saw themselves in it, and veiled it: warned of the cunning of an oft-defeated Tempter.

To do good and sleep well, was their sowing and their reaping. Uneasy consciences could not have slept. The sleeping served for proof of an accurate reckoning and an expungeing of the day's debits. They differed in opinion now and then, as we see companion waves of the river, blown by a gust, roll a shadow between them; and almost equally transient were their differences with a world that they condemned when they could not feel they (as an embodiment of their principles) were leading it. The English world at times betrayed a restiveness in the walled pathway of virtue; for, alas, it closely neighbours the French; only a

Channel, often dangerously smooth, to divide: but it is not perverted for long; and the English Funds are always constant and a tower. Would they be suffered to be so, if libertinism were in the ascendant?

Colney Durance was acquainted with the Duvidney ladies. Hearing of the journey to them and the purport of it, he said, with the mask upon glee: "Then Victor has met his match!" Nataly had sent for him to dine with her in Victor's absence: she was far from grieved, as to the result, by his assurance to her, that Victor had not a chance. Colney thought so. "Just like him! to be off gaily to try and overcome or come over the greatest power in England." They were England herself; the squat old woman she has become by reason of her overlapping numbers of the comfortable fund-holder annuitants: a vast body of passives and negatives, living by precept, according to rules of precedent, and supposing themselves to be righteously guided because of their continuing undisturbed. Them he branded, as hypocritical materialists, and the country for pride in her

sweetmeat plethora of them :—mixed with an ancient Hebrew fear of offence to an inscrutable Lord, eccentrically appeasable through the dreary iteration of the litany of sinfulness. He was near a truth ; and he had the heat of it on him.

Satirists in their fervours might be near it to grasp it, if they could be moved to moral distinctness, mental intention, with a preference of strong plain speech over the crack of their whips. Colney could not or would not praise our modern adventurous, experimental, heroic, tramping active, as opposed to yonder pursy passives and negatives ; he had occasions for flicking the fellow sharply : and to speak of the Lord as our friend present with us, palpable to Reason, perceptible to natural piety solely through the reason, which justifies punishment ; that would have stopped his mouth upon the theme of God-forsaken creatures. Our satirist is an executioner by profession, a moralist in excuse, or at the tail of it ; though he thinks the position reversed, when he moralizes angrily to have his angry use of the scourge

condoned. Nevertheless, he fills a serviceable place; and certainly he is not happy in his business. Colney suffered as heavily as he struck. If he had been no more than a mime in the motley of satire, he would have sucked compensation from the acid of his phrases, for the failure to prick and goad, and work amendment.

He dramatized to Nataly some of the scene going on at the Wells: Victor's petition; his *fugue* in urgency of it; the brief reply of Miss Dorothea and her muted echo Miss Virginia. He was rather their apologist for refusing. But, as when, after himself listening to their 'views,' he had deferentially withdrawn from the ladies of Moorsedge, and had then beheld their strangely-hatted lieutenants and the regiments of the toneless respectable on the pantiles and the mounts, the curse upon the satirist impelled him to generalize. The quiet good ladies were multiplied: they were "the thousands of their sisters, petticoated or long-coated or buck-skinned; comfortable annuitants under clerical shepherding, close upon outnumbering the labourers they para-

lyze at home and stultify abroad." Colney thumped away. The country's annuitants had for type "the figure with the helmet of the Owl-Goddess and the trident of the Earth-shaker, seated on a wheel, at the back of penny-pieces; in whom you see neither the beauty of nakedness nor the charm of drapery; not the helmet's dignity or the trident's power; but she has patently that which stops the wheel; and posing for representative of an imperial nation, she helps to pass a penny." So he passed his epigram, heedless of the understanding or attention of his hearer; who temporarily misjudged him for a man impelled by the vanity of literary point and finish, when indeed it was hot satiric spite, justified of its aim, which crushed a class to extract a drop of scathing acid, in the interests of the country, mankind as well. Nataly wanted a picture painted, colours and details, that she might get a vision of the scene at Moorsedge. She did her best to feel an omen and sound it, in his question "whether the yearly increasing army of the orderly annuitants and their

parasites does not demonstrate the proud old country as a sheath for pith rather than of the vital run of sap." Perhaps it was patriotic to inquire ; and doubtless she was the weakest of women ; she could follow no thought ; her heart was beating blindly beside Victor, hoping for the refusal painful to her through his disappointment.

"You think me foolish," she made answer to one of Colney's shrugs ; "and it has come to that pitch with me, that I cannot be sensible of a merit except in being one with him—obeying, is the word. And I have never yet known him fail. That terrible Lakelands wears a different look to me, when I think of what he can do ; though I would give half my days to escape it."

She harped on the chord of feverish extravagance ; the more hateful to Colney because of his perceiving, that she simulated a blind devotedness to stupefy her natural pride ; and he was divided between stamping on her for an imbecile and dashing at Victor for a maniac. But her situation rendered her pitiable. "You will learn to-morrow what

Victor has done," he said, and thought how the simple words carried the bitterness.

That was uttered within a few minutes of midnight, when the ladies of Moorsedge themselves, after an exhausting resistance to their dearest relative, were at the hall-door of the house with Victor, saying the good-night, to which he responded hurriedly, cordially, dumbly, a baffled man. They clasped hands. Miss Dorothea said: "*You, Victor, always.*" Miss Virginia said: "You will be sure of welcome." He walked out upon the moonless night; and for lack of any rounded object in the smothering darkness to look at, he could nowhere take moorings to gather himself together and define the man who had undergone so portentous a defeat. He was glad of quarters at an hotel, a solitary bed, absence from his Nataly.

For their parts, the ladies were not less shattered. They had no triumph in their victory: the weight of it bore them down. They closed, locked, shot the bolts and fastened the chain of the door. They had to be reminded by the shaking of their

darling dog Tasso's curly silky coat, that he had not taken his evening trot to notify male-factors of his watchfulness and official wrath at sound of footfall or a fancied one. Without consultation, they unbolted the door, and Tasso went forth, to "compose his vesper hymn," as Mr. Posterley once remarked amusingly. Though not pretending to the Muse's crown so far, the little dog had qualities to entrance the spinster sex. His mistresses talked of him; of his readiness to go forth; of the audible first line of his hymn or sonnet; of his instinct telling him that something was wrong in the establishment. For most of the servants at Moorsedge were prostrated by a fashionable epidemic; a slight attack, the doctor said; but Montague, the butler, had withdrawn for the nursing of his wife; Perrin, the footman, was confined to his chamber; Manton, the favourite maid, had appeared in the morning with a face that caused her banishment to bed; and the cook, Mrs. Bannister, then sighingly agreed to send up cold meat for the ladies' dinner. Hence their melancholy inhospitality to their

cousin Victor, who had, in spite of his errors, the right to claim his place at their table, was "of the blood," they said. He was recognized as the living prince of it. His every gesture, every word, recalled the General. The trying scene with him had withered them, they did not speak of it; each had to the other the look of a vessel that has come out of a gale. Would they sleep? They scarcely dared ask it of themselves. They had done rightly; silence upon that reflection seemed best. It was the silence of an inward agitation; still they knew the power of good consciences to summon sleep.

Tasso was usually timed for five minutes. They were astonished to discover by the clock, that they had given him ten. He was very quiet: if so, and for whatever he did, he had his reason, they said: he was a dog endowed with reason; endowed—and how they wished that Mr. Stuart Rem would admit it!—with, their love of the little dog believed (and Mr. Posterley acquiesced), a soul. Do but think it of dear animals, and any form of cruelty to them becomes an im-

possibility, Mr. Stuart Rem ! But he would not be convinced : ungenerously indeed he named Mr. Posterley a courtier. The ladies could have retorted, that Mr. Posterley had not a brother who was the celebrated surgeon Sir Nicholas Rem.

Usually Tasso came running in when the hall-door was opened to him. Not a sound of him could be heard. The ladies blew his familiar whistle. He trotted back to a third appeal, and was, unfortunately for them, not caressed ; he received reproaches from two forefingers directed straight at his reason. He saw it and felt it. The hug of him was deferred to the tender good-night to him in his basket at the foot of the ladies' beds.

On entering their spacious bed-chamber, they were so fatigued that sleep appeared to their minds the compensating logical deduction. Miss Dorothea suppressed a yawn, and inflicted it upon Miss Virginia, who returned it, with an apology, and immediately had her sister's hand on her shoulder, for an attempted control of one of the irresistibles ; a spectacle imparting bitter shudders and shots to the

sympathetic jawbones of an observer. Hand at mouth, for not in privacy would they have been guilty of exposing a grimace, they signified, under an interim smile, their maidenly submission to the ridiculous force of nature : after which, Miss Virginia retired to the dressing-room, absorbed in woeful recollection of the resolute No they had been compelled to reiterate, in response to the most eloquent and, saving for a single instance, admirable man, their cousin, the representative of 'the blood,' supplicating them. A recreant thankfulness coiled within her bosom at the thought, that Dorothea, true to her office of speaker, had tasked herself with the cruel utterance and repetition of the word. Victor's wonderful eyes, his voice, yet more than his urgent pleas ; and also, in the midst of his fiery flood of speech, his gentleness, his patience, pathos, and a man's tone through it all ; were present to her.

Disrobed, she knocked at the door.

"I have called to you twice," Dorothea said ; and she looked a motive for the call.

“What is it?” said Virginia, with faltering sweetness, with a terrible divination.

The movement of a sigh was made. “Are you aware of anything, dear?”

Virginia was taken with the contrary movement of a sniff. But the fear informing it prevented it from being venturesome. Doubt of the pure atmosphere of their bed-chamber, appeared to her as too heretic even for the positive essay. In affirming, that she was not aware of anything, her sight fell on Tasso. His eyeballs were those of a little dog that has been awfully questioned.

“It is more than a suspicion,” said Dorothea; and plainly now, while open to the seductions of any pleasing infidel testimony, her nose in repugnance convicted him absolutely.

Virginia’s nose was lowered a few inches; it inhaled and stopped midway. “You must be mistaken, dear. He never . . .”

“But are you insensible to the . . .” Dorothea’s eyelids fainted.

Virginia dismissed the forlornest of efforts at incredulity. A whiff of Tasso had smitten

her. "Ah!" she exclaimed and fell away. "Is it Tasso! How was it you noticed nothing before undressing, dear?"

"Thinking of what we have gone through to-night! I forgot him. At last the very strange. . . . The like of it I have not ever! . . . And upon that thick coat! And, dear, it is late. We are in the morning hours."

"But, my dear—Oh, dear, what is to be done with him?"

That was the crucial point for discussion. They had no servant to give them aid; Manton, they could not dream of disturbing. And Tasso's character was in the estimate; he hated washing; it balefully depraved his temper; and not only, creature of habit that he was, would he decline to lie down anywhere save in their bedroom, he would lament, plead, insist unremittingly, if excluded; terrifying every poor invalid of the house. Then again, were they at this late hour to dress themselves, and take him downstairs, and light a fire in the kitchen, and boil sufficient water to give him a bath and scrubbing?

Cold water would be death to him. Besides, he would ring out his alarum for the house to hear, pour out all his poetry, poor dear, as Mr. Posterley called it, at a touch of cold water. The catastrophe was one to weep over, the dilemma a trial of the strongest intelligences.

In addition to reviews of their solitary alternative—the having of a befouled degraded little dog in their chamber through the night, they were subjected to a conflict of emotions when eyeing him : and there came to them the painful, perhaps irreverent, perhaps uncharitable, thought :—that the sinner who has rolled in the abominable, must cleanse him and do things to polish him and perfume before again embraced even by the mind : if indeed we can *ever* have our old sentiment for him again ! Mr. Stuart Rem might decide it for them. Nay, before even the heart embraces him, he must completely purify himself. That is to say, the ordinary human sinner—save when a relative. Contemplating Tasso, the hearts of the ladies gushed out in pity of an innocent little dog, knowing not

evil, dependent on his friends for help to be purified ;—necessarily kept at a distance : the very look of him prescribed extreme separation, as far as practicable. But they had proof of a love almost greater than it was previous to the offence, in the tender precautions they took to elude repulsion.

He was rolling on the rug, communicating contagion. Flasks of treble-distilled lavender water, and their favourite, traditional in the family, *eau d'Arquebusade*, were on the toilet-table. They sprinkled his basket, liberally sprinkled the rug and the little dog. Perfume-pastilles were in one of the sitting-rooms below ; and Virginia would have gone down softly to fetch a box, but Dorothea restrained her, in pity for the servants, with the remark : “ It would give us a nightmare of a Roman Catholic Cathedral ! ” A bit of the window was lifted by Dorothea, cautiously, that prowling outsiders might not be attracted. Tasso was wooed to his basket. He seemed inquisitive ; the antidote of his naughtiness excited him ; his tail circled after his muzzle several times ; then he lay. A silken scarf

steeped in *eau d'Arquebusade* was flung across him.

Their customary devout observances concluded, lights were extinguished, and the ladies kissed, and entered their beds. Their beds were not homely to them. Dorothea thought that Virginia was long in settling herself. Virginia did not like the sound of Dorothea's double sigh. Both listened anxiously for the doings of Tasso. He rested.

He was uneasy; he was rounding his basket once more; unaware of the exaggeration of his iniquitous conduct, poor innocent, he shook that dreadful coat of his! He had displaced the prophylactic cover of the scarf.

He drove them in a despair to speculate on the contention between the perfume and the stench in junction, with such a doubt of the victory of which of the two, as drags us to fear our worst. It steals into our nostrils, possesses them. As the History of Mankind has informed us, we were led up to our civilization by the nose. But Philosophy warns us on that eminence, to beware of trusting exclusively to our conductor, lest the mind

of us at least be plunged back into barbarism. The ladies hated both the cause and the consequence, they had a revulsion from the object, of the above contention. But call it not a contention: there is nobility in that. This was a compromise, a degrading union, with very sickening results. Whether they came of an excess of the sprinkling, could not well be guessed. The drenching at least was righteously intended.

Beneath their shut eyelids, they felt more and more the oppression of a darkness not laden with slumber. They saw it in solidity; themselves as restless billows, driven dashing to the despondent sigh. Sleep was denied them.

Tasso slept. He had sinned unknowingly, and that is not a spiritual sin; the chastisement confers the pardon.

But why was this ineffable blessing denied to them? Was it that they might have a survey of all the day's deeds and examine them under the cruel black beams of Insomnia?

Virginia said: "You are wakeful."

"Thoughtful," was the answer.

A century of the midnight rolled on.

Dorothea said : " He behaved very beautifully."

" I looked at the General's portrait while he besought us," Virginia replied.

" One sees him in Victor, at Victor's age. Try to sleep."

" I do. I pray that you may."

Silence courted slumber. Their interchange of speech from the posture of bodies on their backs, had been low and deliberate, in the tone of the vaults. Dead silence recalled the strangeness of it. The night was breathless ; their open window a peril bestowing no boon. They were mutually haunted by sound of the gloomy query at the nostrils of each when drawing the vital breath. But for that, they thought they might have slept.

Bed spake to bed :

" The words of Mr. Stuart Rem last Sunday !"

" He said : ' Be just.' Could one but see direction !"

" In obscurity, feeling is a guide."

“The heart.”

“It may sometimes be followed.”

“When it concerns the family.”

“He would have the living, who are seeking peace, be just.”

“Not to assume the seat of justice.”

Again they lay as tombstone effigies, that have committed the passage of affairs to another procession of the Ages.

There was a gentle sniff, in hopeless confirmation of the experience of its predecessors. A sister to it ensued.

“Could Victor have spoken so, without assurance in his conscience, that his entreaty was righteously addressed to us? that we . . .”

“And no others!”

“I think of his language. He loves the child.”

“In heart as in mind, he is eminently gifted; acknowledging error.”

“He was very young.”

The huge funereal minutes conducted their sonorous hearse, the hour.

It struck in the bed-room Three.

No more than three of the clock, it was the voice telling of half the precious restorative nighthours wasted.

Now, as we close our eyelids when we would go to sleep, so must we, in expectation of the peace of mind granting us the sweet oblivion, preliminarily do something which invokes, that we may obtain it.

“Dear,” Dorothea said.

“I know indeed,” said Virginia.

“We may have been !”

“Not designingly.”

“Indeed not. But harsh it may be named, if the one innocent is to be the sufferer.”

“The child can in no sense be adjudged guilty.”

“It is Victor’s child.”

“He adores the child.”

Wheels were in mute motion within them ; and presently the remark was tossed-up :

“In his coming to us, it is possible to see paternal solicitude.”

Thence came fruit of reflection :

“To be instrumental as guides to a tender young life !”

Reflection heated with visions :

“ Once our dream ! ”

They had the happier feeling of composure, though Tasso possessed the room. Not Tasso, but a sublimated offensiveness, issue of the antagonistically combined, dispersed to be the more penetrating ; insomuch that it seemed to them they could not ever again make use of *eau d'Arquebusade* without the vitiating reminder. So true were the words of Mr. Stuart Rem : ‘ Half measures to purification are the most delusive of our artifices.’ Fatigue and its reflections helped to be peacefuller. Their souls were mounting to a serenity above the nauseating degradation, to which the poor little dog had dragged them.

“ Victor gave his promise.”

“ At least, concession would not imply contact with the guilty.”

Both sighed as they took-up the burden of the vaporous Tasso to drop him ; with the greater satisfaction in the expelling of their breath.

“ It might be said, dear, that concession to

his entreaty does not in any way countenance the sin."

"I can see, dear, how it might be read as a reproof."

Their exchange of sentences followed meditative pauses; Dorothea leading.

"To one so sensitive as Victor!"

"A month or two of our society for the child!"

"It is not the length of time."

"The limitation assures against maternal claims."

"She would not dare."

"He used the words: 'her serious respect' for us. I should not wish to listen to him often."

"We listen to a higher."

"It may really be, that the child is like him."

"Not resembling Mr. Stuart Rem's Clementina!"

"A week of that child gave us our totally sleepless night."

"One thinks more hopefully of a child of Victor's."

"He would preponderate."

“He would.”

They sighed; but it was now with the relief of a lightened oppression.

“If, dear, in truth the father’s look is in the child, he has the greater reason to desire for her a taste of our atmosphere.”

“Do not pursue it. Sleep.”

“One prayer!”

“Your mention of our atmosphere, dear, destroys my power to frame one. Do you, for two. But I would cleanse my heart.”

“There is none purer.”

“Hush.”

Virginia spoke a more fervent word of praise of her sister, and had not the hushing response to it. She heard the soft regular breathing. Her own was in downy fellowship with it a moment later.

At the hour of nine, in genial daylight, sitting over the crumbs of his hotel breakfast, Victor received a little note that bore the handwriting of Dorothea Duvidney.

“Dear Victor, we are prepared to receive the child for a month. In haste, before your train. Our love. D. and V.”

His face flashed out of cloud.

A more precious document had never been handed to him. It chased back to midnight the doubt hovering over his belief in himself;—phrased to say, that he was no longer the Victor Radnor known to the world. And it extinguished a corpse-light recollection of a baleful dream in the night. Here shone radiant witness of his being the very man; save for the spot of his recent confusion in distinguishing his identity or in feeling that he stood whole and solid.—Because of two maiden ladies? Yes, because of two maiden ladies, my good fellow. And friend Colney, you know the ladies, and what the getting round *them* for one's purposes really means.

The sprite of Colney Durance had struck him smartly overnight. Victor's internal crow was over Colney now. And when you have the optimist and pessimist acutely opposed in a mixing group, they direct lively conversations at one another across the gulf of distance, even of time. For a principle is involved, besides the knowledge of the

other's triumph or dismay. The couple are scales of a balance; and not before last night had Victor ever consented to think of Colney ascending while he dropped low to graze the pebbles.

He left his hotel for the station, singing the great aria of the fourth Act of the *Favorita*: neglected since that mighty German with his *Rienzi*, and *Tannhäuser*, and *Tristan and Isolde*, had mastered him, to the displacement of his boyhood's beloved sugary *-inis* and *-antes* and *-zettis*; had clearly mastered, not beguiled, him; had wafted him up to a new realm, invigorating if severer. But now his youth would have its voice. He travelled up to town with Sir Abraham Quatley, and talked, and took and gave hints upon City and Commercial affairs, while the honeyed Italian of the conventional, gloriously animal, stress and flutter had a revel in his veins, now and then mutedly ebullient at the mouth: honeyed, golden, rich in visions;—having surely much more of Nature's encouragement to her children?

CHAPTER IX.

NESTA'S ENGAGEMENT.

A WORD in his ear from Fenellan, touching that man Blathenoy, set the wheels of Victor's brain at work upon his defences, for a minute, on the walk Westward. Who knew?—who did not know! He had a torpid consciousness that he cringed to the world, with an entreaty to the great monster to hold off in ignorance; and the next instant, he had caught its miserable spies by the lurcher neck and was towering. He dwelt on his contempt of them, to curtain the power they could stir.

“The little woman, you say, took to Dartrey?”

Fenellan, with the usual apologetic moderation of a second statement, thought “there was the look of it.”

“ Well, we must watch over her. Dartrey! —but Dartrey’s an honest fellow with women. But men are men. Very few men spare a woman when the mad fit is on her. A little woman—pretty little woman!—wife to Jacob Blathenoy! She mustn’t at her age have any close choosing—under her hand. And Dartrey’s just the figure to strike a spark in a tinder-box head.”

“ With a husband who’d reduce Minerva’s to tinder, after a month of him!”

“ He spent his honeymoon at his place at Wrensham; told me so.” Blathenoy had therefore then heard of the building of Lakelands by the Victor Radnor of the City; and had then, we guess—in the usual honeymoon boasting of a windbag with his bride—wheezed the foul gossip, to hide his emptiness and do duty for amusement of the pretty little caged bird. Probably so. But Victor knew that Blathenoy needed him and feared him. Probably the wife had been enjoined to keep silence; for the Blachingtons, Fannings and others were, it could be sworn, blank and unscratched folio sheets on the subject:—

as yet; unless Mrs. Burman had dropped venom.

"One pities the little woman, eh, Fenellan?"

"Dartrey won't be back for a week or so; and they're off to Switzerland, after the dinner they give. I heard from him this morning; one of the Clanconans is ill."

"Lucky. But wherever Blathenoy takes her, he must be the same 'arid bore,' as old Colney says."

"A domestic simoom," said Fenellan, booming it: and Victor had a shudder.

"Awful thing, marriage, to some women! We chain them to that domestic round; most of them haven't the means of independence or a chance of winning it; and all that's open to them, if they've made a bad cast for a mate—and good Lord! how are they to know before it's too late!—they haven't a choice except to play tricks or jump to the deuce or sit and 'drape in blight,' as Colney has it; though his notion of the optional marriages, broken or renewed every seven years!—if he means it. You never know,

with him. It sounds like another squirt of savage irony. It's donkey nonsense, eh?"

"The very hee-haw of nonsense," Fenellan acquiesced.

"Come, come; read your Scriptures; donkeys have shown wisdom," Victor said, rather leaning to the theme of a fretfulness of women in the legal yoke. "They're donkeys till we know them for prophets. Who can tell! Colney may be hailed for one fifty years hence."

Fenellan was not invited to enter the house, although the loneliness of his lodgings was known, and also, that he played whist at his Club. Victor had grounds for turning to him at the door and squeezing his hand warmly, by way of dismissal. In ascribing them to a weariness at Fenellan's perpetual acquiescence, he put the cover on them, and he stamped it with a repudiation of the charge, that Colney's views upon the great Marriage Question were the 'very hee-haw of nonsense.' They were not the hee-haw; in fact, viewing the host of marriages, they were for discussion; there was no bray about

them. He could not feel them to be absurd while Mrs. Burman's tenure of existence barred the ceremony. Anything for a phrase! he murmured of Fenellan's talk; calling him, Dear old boy, to soften the slight.

Nataly had not seen Fenellan or heard from Dartrey; so she continued to be uninformed of her hero's release; and that was in the order of happy accidents. She had hardly to look her interrogation for the news: it radiated. But he stated such matter-of-course briefly. "The good ladies are ready to receive our girl."

Her chagrin resolved to a kind of solace of her draggled pride, in the idea, that he who tamed everybody to submission, might well have command of her.

The note, signed D. and V., was shown.

There stood the words. And last night she had been partly of the opinion of Colney Durance. She sank down among the unreasoning abject;—not this time with her perfect love of him, but with a resistance and a dubiety under compression. For she had

not quite comprehended why Nesta should go. This readiness of the Duvidney ladies to receive the girl, stopped her mental inquiries.

She begged for a week's delay; "before the parting;" as her dear old silly mother's pathos whimpered it, of the separation for a month! and he smiled and hummed pleasantly at any small petition, thinking her in error to expect Dartrey's return to town before the close of a week: and then wondering at women, mildly denouncing in his heart the mothers who ran risk of disturbing their daughters' bosoms with regard to particular heroes married or not. Dartrey attracted women: he was one of the men who do it without effort. Victor's provident mind blamed the mother for the indiscreetness of her wish to have him among them. But Dudley had been making way bravely of late; he improved; he began to bloom, like a Spring flower of the garden protected from frosts under glass; and Fredi was the sheltering and nourishing bestower of the lessons. One could see, his questions and other little points revealed, that he had a

certain lover's dread of Dartrey Fenellan; a sort of jealousy: Victor understood the feeling. To love a girl, who has her ideal of a man elsewhere in another; though she may know she never can wed the man, and has not the hope of it; is torment to the lover quailing, as we do in this terrible season of the priceless deliciousness, stripped against all the winds that blow; skinless at times. One gets up a sympathy for the poor shy dependent shivering lover. Nevertheless, here was young Dudley waking, visibly becoming bolder. As in the flute-duets, he gained fire from concert. The distance between Cronidge and Moorsedge was two miles and a quarter.

Instead of the delay of a whole week, Victor granted four days, which embraced a musical evening at Mrs. John Cormyn's on the last of the days, when Nesta was engaged to sing with her mother a duet of her own composition, the first public fruit of her lessons in counterpoint from rigid Herr Sträuscher, who had said what he had said, in letting it pass: eulogy, coming from him.

So Victor heard, and he doated on the surprise to come for him, in a boyish anticipation. The girl's little French ballads under tutelage of Louise de Seilles promised, though they were imitative. If Sträuscher let this pass . . . Victor saw Grand Opera somewhere to follow ; England's claim to be a creative musical nation vindicated ; and the genius of the fair sex as well.

He heard the duet at Mrs. Cormyn's ; and he imagined a hearing of his Fredi's Opera, and her godmother's delight in it ; the once-famed Sanfredini's consent to be the *diva* at a rehearsal, and then her compelling her hidalgo *duque* to consent further : an event not inconceivable. For here was downright genius ; the flowering aloe of the many years in formation ; and Colney admitted the song to have a streak of genius ; though he would pettishly and stupidly say, that our modern newspaper Press is able now to force genius for us twenty or so to the month, excluding Sundays—our short pauses for the incubation of it. Real rare genius was in that song, nothing forced ; and exquisite melody ; one

of those melodies which fling gold chains about us and lead us off, lead us back into Eden. Victor hummed at bars of it on the drive homeward. His darlings had to sing it again in the half-lighted drawing-room. The bubble-happiness of the three was vexed only by tidings heard from Colney during the evening of a renewed instance of Skepsey's misconduct. Priscilla Graves had hurried away to him at the close of Mr. John Cormyn's Concert, in consequence; in grief and in sympathy. Skepsey was to appear before the magistrate next morning, for having administered physical chastisement to his wife during one of her fits of drunkenness. Colney had seen him. His version of the story was given, however, in the objectionable humorous manner: none could gather from it what might be pleaded for Skepsey. His 'lesson to his wife in the art of pugilism, before granting her Captain's rank among the Defensive Amazons of Old England,' was the customary patent absurdity. But it was odd, that Skepsey always preferred his appeal for help to Colney Durance. Nesta

proposed following Priscilla that night. She had hinted her wish, on the way home; she was urgent, beseeching, when her father lifted praises of her: she had to start with her father by the train at seven in the morning, and she could not hear of poor Skepsey for a number of hours. She begged a day's delay; which would enable her, she said, to join them in dining at the Blachington's, and seeing dear Lakelands again. "I was invited, you know." She spoke in childish style, and under her eyes she beheld her father and mother exchange looks. He had a fear that Nataly might support the girl's petition. Nataly read him to mean, possible dangers among the people at Wrensham. She had seemed hesitating. After meeting Victor's look, her negative was firm. She tried to make it one of distress for the use of the negative to her own dear girl. Nesta spied beneath.

But what was it? There was a reason for her going! She had a right to stay, and see and talk with Captain Dartrey, and she was to be deported!

So now she set herself to remember little incidents at Creckholt: particularly a conversation in a very young girl's hearing, upon Sir Humphrey and Lady Pottil's behaviour to the speakers, her parents. She had then, and she now had, an extraordinary feeling, as from a wind striking upon soft summer weather off regions of ice, that she was in her parents' way. How? The feeling was irrational; it could give her no reply, or only the multitudinous which are the question violently repeated. She slept on it.

She and her father breakfasted by the London birds' first twitter. They talked of Skepsey. She spoke of her going as exile. "No," said he, "you're sure to meet friends."

Her cheeks glowed. It came wholly through the suddenness of the recollection, that the family-seat of one among the friends was near the Wells.

He was allowed to fancy, as it suited him to fancy, that a vivid secret pleasure laid the colour on those ingenuous fair cheeks.

"A solitary flute for me, for a month! I

shall miss my sober comrade : got the habit of duetting : and he's gentle, bears with me."

Tears lined her eyelids. "Who would not be, dearest dada! But there is nothing to bear except the honour."

"You like him? You and I always have the same tastes, Fredi."

Now there was a reddening of the sun at the mount; all the sky aflame. How could he know that it was not the heart in the face! She reddened because she had perused his wishes; had detected a scheme striking off from them, and knew a man to be the object of it; and because she had at the same time the sense of a flattery in her quick divination; and she was responsively emotional, her blood virginal; often it was a tropical lightning.

It looked like the heart doing rich painter's work on maiden features. Victor was naturally as deceived as he wished to be.

From his being naturally so, his remarks on Dudley had an air of embracing him as one of the family. "His manner to me just hits me."

"I like to see him with you," she said.

Her father let his tongue run: "One of the few young men I feel perfectly at home with! I do like dealing with a gentleman. I can confide in a gentleman: honour, heart, whatever I hold dearest."

There he stopped, not too soon. The girl was mute, fully agreeing, slightly hardening. She had a painful sense of separation from her dear Louise. And it was now to be from her mother as well: she felt the pain when kissing her mother in bed. But this was moderated by the prospect of a holiday away out of reach of Mr. Barmby's pursuing voice, whom her mother favoured: and her mother was concealing something from her; so she could not make the confidante of her mother. Nataly had no forewarnings. Her simple regrets filled her bosom. All night she had been taking her chastisement, and in the morning it seemed good to her, that she should be denuded, for her girl to learn the felicity of having relatives.

For some reason, over which Nataly mused in the succeeding hours, the girl had not spoken of any visit her mother was to pay to

the Duvidney ladies or they to her. Latterly she had not alluded to her mother's family. It might mean, that the beloved and dreaded was laying finger on a dark thing in the dark; reading syllables by touch; keeping silence over the communications to a mind not yet actively speculative, as it is a way with young women. "With young women educated for the market, to be timorous, consequently secretive, rather snaky," Colney Durance had said. Her Nesta was not one of the "framed and glazed" description, cited by him, for an example of the triumph of the product; "exactly harmonious with the ninny male's ideal of female innocence." No; but what if the mother had opened her heart to her girl? It had been of late her wish or a dream, shaping hourly to a design, now positively to go through that furnace. Her knowledge of Victor's objection, restrained an impulse that had not won spring enough to act against his counsel or vivify an intelligence grown dull in slavery under him, with regard to the one seeming right course. The adoption of it

would have wounded him—therefore her. She had thought of him first; she had also thought of herself, and she blamed herself now. She went so far as to think, that Victor was guilty of the schemer's error of counting human creatures arithmetically, in the sum, without the estimate of distinctive qualities and value here and there. His return to a shivering sensitiveness on the subject of his girl's enlightenment "just yet," for which Nataly pitied and loved him, sharing it, with humiliation for doing so, became finally her excuse. We must have some excuse, if we would keep to life.

Skepsey's case appeared in the evening papers. He confessed, "frankly," he said, to the magistrate, that, "acting under temporary exasperation, he had lost for a moment a man's proper self-command." He was as frank in stating, that he "occupied the prisoner's place before his Worship a second time, and was a second time indebted to the gentleman, Mr. Colney Durance, who so kindly stood by him." There was hilarity in the Court at his quaint sententious envelop-

ment of the idiom of the streets, which he delivered with solemnity: "He could only plead, not in absolute justification—an appeal to human sentiments—the feelings of a man of the humbler orders, returning home in the evening, and his thoughts upon things not without their importance, to find repeatedly the guardian of his household beastly drunk, and destructive." Colney made the case quite intelligible to the magistrate; who gravely robed a strain of the idiomatic in the officially awful, to keep in tune with his delinquent. No serious harm had been done to the woman. Skepsey was admonished and released. His wife expressed her willingness to forgive him, now he had got his lesson; and she hoped he would understand, that there was no need for a woman to learn pugilism. Skepsey would have explained; but the case was over, he was hustled out. However, a keen young reporter present smelt fun for copy; he followed the couple; and in a particular evening Journal, laughable matter was printed concerning Skepsey's view of the pugilism to be imparted to women for their physical pro-

tection in extremity, and the distinction of it from the blow conveying the moral lesson to them ; his wife having objected to the former, because it annoyed her and he pestered her ; and she was never, she said, ready to stand up to him for practice, as he called it, except when she had taken more than he thought wholesome for her :—he had no sense. There was a squabble between them, because he chose to scour away to his master's office instead of conducting her home with the honours. Nesta read the young reporter's version, with shrieks. She led the ladies of Moorsedge to discover amusement in it.

At first, as her letter to her mother described them, they were like a pair of pieces of costly China, with the settled smile, and cold. She saw but the outside of them, and she continued reporting the variations, which steadily determined to warmth. On the night of the third day, they kissed her tenderly ; they were human figures.

No one could be aware of the trial undergone by the good ladies in receiving her : Victor's child ; but, as their phrase would have

run, had they dared to give it utterance to one another, a child of sin. How foreign to them, in that character; how strange, when she was looked on as an inhabitant of their house; they hardly dared to estimate; until the timorous estimation, from gradually swelling, suddenly sank; nature invaded them; they could discard the alienating sense of the taint; and not only did they no longer fear the moment when Mr. Stuart Rem or Mr. Posterley might call for evening tea, but they consulted upon inviting the married one of those gentlemen, "to divert dear Nesta." Every night she slept well. In all she did, she proved she was 'of the blood.' She had Victor's animated eyes; she might have, they dreaded to think, his eloquence. They put it down to his eloquence entirely, that their resistance to his petition had been overcome, for similarly with the treatment of the private acts of royal personages by lacquey History, there is, in the minds of the ultra-civilized, an insistance, that any event having a consequence in matters personal to them, be at all hazards recorded with the utmost nicety in

decency. By such means, they preserve the ceremonial self-respect, which is a necessity of their existence ; and so they maintain the regal elevation over the awe-struck subjects of their interiors ; who might otherwise revolt, pull down, scatter, dishonour, expose for a shallow fiction the holiest, the most vital to them. A democratic evil spirit is abroad, generated among congregations, often perilously communicating its wanton laughter to the desperate wickedness they know (not solely through the monition of Mr. Stuart Rem) to lurk within. It has to be excluded : on certain points they must not think. The night of Tasso was darkly clouded in the minds of the pure ladies : a rift would have seized their half-slumbering sense of smell, to revive the night, perhaps disorder the stately march of their intelligences.

Victor's eloquence, Victor's influence, Victor's child : he carried them as a floodstream, insomuch, that their reception of this young creature of the blot on her birth, was regarded by them in the unmentioned abstract, and the child's presence upon earth seen with the

indulgence (without the naughty curiosity) of the loyal moral English for the numerous offspring of the peccadillos of their monarchs. These things pass muster from being "Britannically cocooned in the purple," says our irreverent satirist; and the maiden ladies' passion of devotion to 'the blood' helped to blind them; but still more so did the imperious urgency to curtain closely the night of Tasso, throwing all its consequences upon Victor's masterful tongue. Whence it ensued (and here is the danger for illogical individuals as well as vast communities, who continue to batten upon fiction when the convenience of it has taken the place of pleasure), that they had need to exalt his eloquence, for a cloak to their conduct; and doing it, they fell into a habit of yielding to him; they disintegrated under him; rules, principles, morality, were shaken to some confusion. And still proceeding thus, they now and then glanced back, more wonderingly than convicted sinners upon their days of early innocence, at the night when successfully they withstood him. They who had doubted of the rightness of

letting Victor's girl come into collision with two clerical gentlemen, one of whom was married, permitted him now to bring the Hon. Dudley Sowerby to their house, and make appointments to meet Mr. Dudley Sowerby under a roof that sheltered a young lady, evidently the allurements to the scion of aristocracy ; of whose family Mr. Stuart Rem had spoken in the very kindling hushed tones, proper to the union of a sacerdotal and an English citizen's veneration.

How would it end ? And if some day this excellent Mr. Dudley Sowerby reproached them ! He could not have a sweeter bride, one more truly a lady in education and manners ; but the birth ! the child's name ! Their trouble was emitted in a vapour of interjections. Very perplexing was it for the good ladies of strict principles to reflect, as dimly they did, that the concrete presence of dear Nesta silenced and overcame objections to her being upon earth. She seemed, as it were, a draught of redoubtable Nature inebriating morality. But would others be similarly affected ? Victor might get his release, to do

justice to the mother : it would not cover the child. Prize as they might the quality of the Radnor blood (drawn from the most ancient of original Britain's princes), there was also the Cantor blood for consideration ; and it was old, noble, proud. Would it be satisfied in matching itself with great wealth, a radiant health, and the good looks of a young flower ? For the sake of the dear girl, the ladies hoped that it would ; and they enlarged the outline of their wedding present, while, in their minds, the noble English family which could be satisfied so, was lowered, partaking of the taint they had personally ceased to recognize.

Of one thing they were sure, and it enlisted them : the gentleman loved the girl. Her love of him, had it been prominent to view, would have stirred a feminine sigh, not more, except a feminine lecture to follow. She was quite uninflamed, fresh and cool as a spring. His ardour had no disguise. They measured him by the favourite fiction's heroes of their youth, and found him to gaze, talk, comport himself, according to the prescription ; correct

grammar, finished sentences, all that is expected of a gentleman enamoured; and ever with the watchful intentness for his lady's faintest first dawn of an inclining to a wish. Mr. Dudley Sowerby's eye upon Nesta was really an apprentice. There is in Love's young season a magnanimity in the male kind. Their superior strength and knowledge are made subservient to the distaff of the weaker and shallower: they crown her queen; her look is their mandate. So was it when Sir Charles and Sir Rupert and the estimable Villiers Davenant touched maidenly hearts to throb: so is it now, with the Hon. Dudley Sowerby.

Very haltingly, the ladies were guilty of a suggestion to Victor. "Oh! Fredi?" said he; "admires her, no doubt; and so do I, so we all do; she's one of the nice girls; but as to Cupid's darts, she belongs to the cucumber family, and he shoots without fireing. We shall do the mischief if we put an interdict. Don't you remember the green days when obstacles were the friction to light that match?" Their pretty nod of assent

displayed the virgin pride of the remembrance : they dreamed of having once been exceedingly wilful ; it refreshed their nipped natures ; and dwelling on it, they forgot to press their suggestion. Incidentally, he named the sum his Fredi would convey to her husband ; with, as was calculable, the further amount his only child would inherit. A curious effect was produced on them. Though they were not imaginatively mercenary, as the creatures tainted with wealth commonly are, they talked of the sum over and over in the solitude of their chamber. "Dukes have married for less." Such an heiress, they said, might buy up a Principality. Victor had supplied them with something of an apology to the gentleman proposing to Nesta in their house.

The chronicle of it is, that Dudley Sowerby did this on the fifteenth day of September ; and that it was not known to the damsel's parents before the twenty-third ; as they were away on an excursion in South Tyrol :—away, flown, with just a word of the hurried departure to their envious, exiled girl ; though they did not tell her of new constructions

at the London house partly causing them to fly. Subject to their consent, she wrote, she had given hers. The letter was telegraphic on the essential point. She wrote of Mr. Barmby's having visited Mr. Posterley at the Wells, and she put it just as flatly. Her principal concern, to judge by her writing, was, to know what Mr. Durance had done, during her absence, with the group of emissary-advocates of the various tongues of Europe on board the steam-Liner conducting them the first stage of their journey to the Court of Japan. Mr. Simeon Fenellan had written his opinion, that all these delegates of the different European nationalities were nothing other than dupes of a New-York Syndicate of American Humorists, not without an eye on the mainchance; and he was sure they would be set to debate publicly, before an audience of high-priced tickets, in the principal North American Cities, previous to the embarkation for Japan at San Francisco. Mr. Fenellan eulogized the immense astuteness of Dr. Gannius in taking his daughter Delphica with him. Dr.

Gannius had singled forth poor Dr. Bouthoin for the object of his attacks; but Nesta was chiefly anxious to hear of Delphica's proceedings; she was immensely interested in Delphica, and envied her; and the girl's funny speculations over the play of Delphica's divers arts upon the Greek, and upon the Russian, and upon the English curate Mr. Semhians, and upon M. Falarique—set Gallically pluming and crowing out of an Alsace-Lorraine growl—were clever. Only, in such a letter, they were amazing.

Nataly received it at Campiglio, when about to start for an excursion down the Sarca Valley to Arco. Her letter of reply was delayed. One to Victor from Dudley Sowerby, awaited them, on their return. "Confirms Fredi," he said, showing it, and praising it as commendable, properly fervid. She made pretence to read, she saw the words.

Her short beat of wings was over. She had joined herself with Victor's leap for a change, thirsting for the scenery of the white peaks in heaven, to enjoy through his enjoyment, if her own capacity was dead: and she

had found it revive, up to some recovery of her old songful readiness for invocations of pleasure. Escape and beauty beckoned ahead ; behind were the chains. These two letters of the one fact plucked her back. The chained body bore the fluttering spirit : or it was the spirit in bonds, that dragged the body. Both were abashed before the image of her girl. Out of the riddle of her strange Nesta, one thing was clear : she did not love the man : and Nataly tasted gladness in that, from the cup of poisonous regrets at the thought. Her girl's heart would not be broken. But if he so strongly loved her, as to hold to this engagement? . . . It might then be worse. She dropped a plumb-line into the young man, sounding him by what she knew of him and judged. She had to revert to Nesta's charm, for the assurance of his anchored attachment.

Her holiday took the burden of her trouble, and amid the beauty of a disenchanted scene, she resumed the London incubus.

“ You told him of her being at the Wells? in the neighbourhood, Victor? ”

“Didn’t you know, my dear, the family-seat is Cronidge, two miles out from the Wells?—and particularly pretty country.”

“I had forgotten, if I ever heard. You will not let him be in ignorance?”

“My dear love, you are pale about it. This is a matter between men. I write, thanking for the honour and so forth; and I appoint an interview; and I show him my tablets. He must be told, necessarily. Incidents of this kind come in their turn. If Dudley does not account himself the luckiest young fellow in the kingdom, he’s not worthy of his good fortune. I wish they were both here now, honeymooning among these peaks, seeing the crescent over one, as we did last night!”

“Have you an idea, in reading Nesta’s letter?”

“Seems indifferent?—mere trick to hide the blushes. And I, too, I’m interested in Delphica. Delphica and Falarique will be fine stage business. Of course, Dr. Bouthoin and his curate!—we know what Old England has to expect from Colney.”

"At any rate, Mr. Durance hurts no one. You will, in your letter, appoint the day of the interview?"

"Hurts himself! Yes, dearest; appoint for—ten days homeward—eleventh day from to-day. And you to Fredi: a bit of description—as you can, my Nataly! Happy to be a dolomite, to be painted by Nataly's pen."

The sign is evil, when we have a vexatious ringing in the ear of some small piece of familiar domestic chatter, and subject it to scrutiny, hang on it, worry and magnify it. What will not creatures under sway of the sensational life, catch at to emphasize and strengthen distaste, until distaste shall have a semblance of reason, in the period of the mind's awakening to revolt! Nataly shrank from the name of dolomite, detested the name, though the scenes regained their beauty or something of it beneath her showery vision. Every time Victor spoke of dolomites on the journey homeward, she had at heart an accusation of her cowardice, her duplicity, frailty, treachery to the highest of her worship and sole support of her endurance in the

world : not much blaming him : but the degrading view of herself sank them both. On a shifty soil, down goes the idol. For him she could plead still, for herself she could not.

The smell of the Channel brine inspirited her sufficiently to cast off the fit and make it seem, in the main, a bodily depression ; owing to causes, of which she was beginning to have an apprehensive knowledge : and they were not so fearful to her as the gloom they displaced.

CHAPTER X.

NATALY IN ACTION.

A TUCKET of herald newspapers told the world of Victor's returning to his London. Pretty Mrs. Blathenoy was Nataly's first afternoon visitor, and was graciously received; no sign of inquiry for the cause of the lady's alacrity to greet her being shown. Colney Durance came in, bringing the rumour of an Australian cantatrice to kindle Europe; Mr. Peridon, a seeker of tidings from the city of Bourges; Miss Priscilla Graves, reporting of Skepsey, in a holiday Sunday tone, that his alcoholic partner might at any moment release him; Mr. Septimus Barmby, with a hanged heavy look, suggestive of a wharfside crane swinging the ponderous thing he had to say. "I have seen Miss Radnor."

"She was well?" the mother asked, and the grand basso pitched forth an affirmative.

"Dear sweet girl she is!" Mrs. Blathenoy exclaimed to Colney.

He bowed. "Very sweet. And can let fly on you, like a haggis, for a scratch."

She laughed, glad of an escape from the conversational formalities imposed on her by this Mrs. Victor Radnor's mighty manner. "But what girl worth anything! . . . We all can do that, I hope, for a scratch!"

Mr. Barmby's Profession dissented.

Mr. Catkin appeared; ten minutes after his Peridon. He had met Victor near the Exchange, and had left him humming the *non à sogno* of ERNANI.

"Ah, when Victor takes to Verdi, it's a flat City, and wants a burst of drum and brass," Colney said; and he hummed a few bars of the march in Attila, and shrugged. He and Victor had once admired that blatancy.

Mr. Pempton appeared, according to anticipation. He sat himself beside Priscilla. Entered Mrs. John Cormyn, voluminous; Mrs. Peter Yatt, effervescent; Nataly's own

people were about her and she felt at home.

Mrs. Blathenoy pushed a small thorn into it, by speaking of Captain Fenellan, and aside, as if sharing him with her. Nataly heard, that Dartrey had been the guest of these Blathenoys. Even Dartrey was but a man!

Rather lower under her voice, the vain little creature asked: "You knew her?"

"Her?"

The cool counter-interrogation was disregarded. "So sad! In the desert! a cup of pure water worth more than barrow-loads of gold! Poor woman!"

"Who?"

"His wife."

"Wife!"

"They were married?"

Nataly could have cried: Snake! Her play at brevity had certainly been foiled. She nodded gravely. A load of dusky wonders and speculations pressed at her bosom. She disdained to question the mouth which had bitten her.

Mrs. Blathenoy, resolving, that despite the

jealousy she excited, she would have her friend in Captain Fenellan, whom she liked—liked, she was sure, quite as innocently as any other woman of his acquaintance did, departed: and she hugged her innocence defiantly, with the mournful pride which will sometimes act as a solvent.

A remark or two passed among the company upon her pretty face.

Nataly murmured to Colney: "Is there anything of Dartrey's wife?"

"Dead," he answered.

"When?"

"Months back. I had it from Simeon. You didn't hear?"

She shook her head. Her ears buzzed. If he had it from Simeon Fenellan, Victor must have known it.

Her duties of hostess were conducted with the official smile.

As soon as she stood alone, she dropped on a chair, like one who has taken a shot in the heart, and that hideous tumult of wild cries at her ears blankly ceased. Dartrey, Victor, Nesta, were shifting figures of the might-have-

been : for whom a wretched erring woman, washed clean of her guilt by death, in a far land, had gone to her end : vainly gone : and now another was here, a figure of wood, in man's shape, conjured up by one of the three, to divide the two others ; likely to be fatal to her or to them : to her, she hoped, if the choice was to be : and beneath the leaden hope, her heart set to a rapid beating, a fainter, a chill at the core.

She snatched for breath. She shut her eyes, and with open lips, lay waiting ; prepared to thank the kindness about to hurry her hence, out of the seas of pain, without pain.

Then came sighs. The sad old servant in her bosom was resuming his labours.

But she had been near it—very near it ? A gush of pity for Victor, overwhelmed her hardness of mind.

Unreflectingly, she tried her feet to support her, and tottered to the door, touched along to the stairs, and descended them, thinking strangely upon such a sudden weakness of body, when she would no longer have thought herself the weak woman. Her aim was to

reach the library. She sat on the stairs midway, pondering over the length of her journey : and now her head was clearer ; for she was travelling to get Railway-guides, and might have had them from the hands of a footman, and imagined that she had considered it prudent to hide her investigation of those books : proofs of an understanding fallen backward to the state of infant and having to begin our drear ascent again.

A slam of the kitchen stair-door restored her. She betrayed no infirmity of footing as she walked past Arlington in the hall ; and she was alive to the voice of Skepsey presently on the door-steps. Arlington brought her a note.

Victor had written : "My love, I dine with Blathenoy in the City, at the Walworth. Business. Skepsey for clothes. Eight of us. Formal. A thousand embraces. Late."

Skepsey was ushered in. His wife had expired at noon, he said ; and he postured decorously the grief he could not feel, knowing that a lady would expect it of him. His wife had fallen down stone steps ; she died in

hospital. He wished to say, she was no loss to the country ; but he was advised within of the prudence of abstaining from comment and trusting to his posture, and he squeezed a drop of conventional sensibility out of it, and felt improved.

Nataly sent a line to Victor : “ Dearest, I go to bed early, am tired. Dine well. Come to me in the morning.”

She reproached herself for coldness to poor Skepsey, when he had gone. The prospect of her being alone until the morning had been so absorbing a relief.

She found a relief also in work at the book of the trains. A walk to the telegraph-station strengthened her. Especially after despatching a telegram to Mr. Dudley Sowerby at Cronidge, and one to Nesta at Moorsedge, did she become stoutly nerved. The former was requested to meet her at Penshurst station at noon. Nesta was to be at the station for the Wells at three o'clock.

From the time of the flying of these telegrams, up to the tap of Victor's knuckle on her bed-room door next morning, she was

not more reflectively conscious than a packet travelling to its destination by pneumatic tube. Nor was she acutely impressionable to the features and the voice she loved.

"You know of Skepsey?" she said.

"Ah, poor Skepsey!" Victor frowned and heaved.

"One of us ought to stand beside him at the funeral."

"Colney or Fenellan?"

"I will ask Mr. Durance."

"Do, my darling."

"Victor, you did not tell me of Dartrey's wife."

"There again! They all get released! Yes, Dartrey! Dartrey has his luck too."

She closed her eyes, with the desire to be asleep.

"You should have told me, dear."

"Well, my love! Well—poor Dartrey! I fancy I hadn't a confirmation of the news. I remember a horrible fit of envy on hearing the hint: not much more than a hint: serious illness, was it?—or expected event. Hardly worth while to trouble my dear soul, till

certain. Anything about wives, forces me to think of myself—my better self!”

“I had to hear of it first from Mrs. Blathenoy.”

“You’ve heard of duels in dark rooms:—that was the case between Blathenoy and me last night for an hour.”

She feigned somnolent fatigue over her feverish weariness of heart. He kissed her on the forehead.

Her spell-bound intention to speak of Dudley Sowerby to him, was broken by the sounding of the hall-door, thirty minutes later. She had lain in a trance.

Life surged to her with the thought, that she could decide and take her step. Many were the years back since she had taken a step; less independently then than now; unregretted, if fatal. Her brain was heated for the larger view of things and the swifter summing of them. It could put the man at a remove from her and say, that she had lived with him and suffered intensely. It gathered him to her breast rejoicing in their union: the sharper the scourge, the keener the exulta-

tion. But she had one reproach to deafen and beat down. This did not come on her from the world : she and the world were too much foot to foot on the antagonist's line, for her to listen humbly. It came of her quick summary survey of him, which was unnoticed by the woman's present fiery mind as being new or strange in any way : simply it was a fact she now read ; and it directed her to reproach herself for an abasement beneath his leadership, a blind subserviency and surrender of her faculties to his greater powers, such as no soul of a breathing body should yield to man : not to the highest, not to the Titan, not to the most Godlike of men. Under cloak, they demand it. They demand their bane.

And Victor ! . . . She had seen into him.

The reproach on her was, that she, in her worship, had been slave, not helper. Scarcely was she irreproachable in the character of slave. If it had but been *utter* slave ! she phrased the words, for a further reproach. She remembered having at times murmured, dissented. And it would have been a desperate proud thought to comfort a slave, that never

once had she known even a secret opposition to the will of her lord.

But she had: she recalled instances. Up they rose; up rose everything her mind ranged over, subsiding immediately when the service was done. She had not conceived her beloved to be infallible, surest of guides in all earthly matters. Her intellect had sometimes protested.

What, then, had moved her to swamp it?

Her heart answered. And that heart also was arraigned: and the heart's fleshly habitation acting on it besides: so flagellant of herself was she: covertly, however, and as the chaste among women can consent to let our animal face them. Not grossly, still perceptibly to her penetrative hard eye on herself, she saw the senses of the woman under a charm. She saw, and swam whirling with a pang of revolt from her personal being and this mortal kind.

Her rational intelligence righted her speedily. She could say in truth, by proof, she loved the man: nature's love, heart's love, soul's love. She had given him her life.

It was a happy cross-current recollection, that the very beginning and spring of this wild cast of her life, issued from something he said and did (merest of airy gestures) to signify the blessing of life—how good and fair it is. A drooping mood in her had been struck; he had a look like the winged lyric up in blue heavens: he raised the head of the young flower from its contemplation of grave-mould. That was when he had much to bear: Mrs. Burman present: and when the stranger in their household had begun to pity him and have a dread of her feelings. The lucent splendour of his eyes was memorable, a light above the rolling oceans of Time.

She had given him her life, little aid. She might have closely counselled, wound in and out with his ideas. Sensible of capacity, she confessed to the having been morally subdued, physically as well; swept onward; and she was arrested now by an accident, like a waif of the river-floods by the dip of a branch. Time that it should be! But was not Mr. Durance, inveighing against the favoured system for the education of women, right

when he declared them to be unfitted to speak an opinion on any matter external to the household or in a crisis of the household? She had not agreed with him: he presented stinging sentences, which irritated more than they enlightened. Now it seemed to her, that the model women of men make pleasant slaves, not true mates: they lack the worldly training to know themselves or take a grasp of circumstances. There is an exotic fostering of the senses for women, not the strengthening breath of vital common air. If good fortune is with them, all may go well: the stake of their fates is upon the perpetual smooth flow of good fortune. She had never joined to the cry of the women. Few among them were having it in the breast as loudly.

Hard on herself, too, she perceived how the social rebel had reduced her mind to propitiate a simulacrum, reflected from out, of an enthroned Society within it, by an advocacy of the existing laws and rules and habits. Eminently servile is the tolerated lawbreaker: none so conservative. Not until

we are driven back upon an unviolated Nature, do we call to the intellect to think radically : and then we begin to think of our fellows.

Or when we have set ourselves in motion direct for the doing of the right thing : have quitted the carriage at the station, and secured the ticket, and entered the train, counting the passage of time for a simple rapid hour before we have eased heart in doing justice to ourself and to another ; then likewise the mind is lighted for radiation. That doing of the right thing, after a term of paralysis, cowardice—any evil name—is one of the mighty reliefs, equal to happiness, of longer duration.

Nataly had it. But her mind was actually radiating, and the comfort to her heart evoked the image of Dartrey Fenellan. She saw a possible reason for her bluntness to the coming scene with Dudley.

At once she said, No ! and closed the curtain ; knowing what was behind, counting it nought. She repeated almost honestly her positive negative. How we are mixed of the

many elements! she thought, as an observer; and self-justifyingly thought on, and with truth, that duty urged her upon this journey; and proudly thought, that she had not a shock of the painful great organ in her breast at the prospect at the end, or any apprehension of its failure to carry her through.

Yet the need of peace or some solace needed to prepare her for the interview turned her imagination burningly on Dartrey. She would not allow herself to meditate over hopes and schemes:—Nesta free: Dartrey free. She vowed to her soul sacredly—and she was one of those in whom the Divinity lives, that they may do so—not to speak a word for the influencing of Dudley save the one fact. Consequently, for a personal indulgence, she mused; she caressed maternally the object of her musing; of necessity, she excluded Nesta; but in tenderness she gave Dartrey a fair one to love him.

The scene was waved away. That one so loving him, partly worthy of him, ready to traverse the world now beside him—who could it be other than she who knew and

prized his worth? Foolish! It is one of the hatefuller scourges upon women whenever, a little shaken themselves, they muse upon some man's image, that they cannot put in motion the least bit of drama without letting feminine self play a part; generally to develop into a principal part. The apology makes it a melancholy part.

Dartrey's temper of the caged lion dominated by his tamer, served as key-note for any amount of saddest colouring. He controlled the brute: but he held the contempt of danger, the love of strife, the passion for adventure; he had crossed the desert of human anguish. He of all men required a devoted mate, merited her. Of all men living, he was the hardest to match with a woman—with a woman deserving him.

The train had quitted London. Now for the country, now for free breathing! She who two days back had come from Alps, delighted in the look on flat green fields. It was under the hallucination of her saying in flight adieu to them, and to England; and, that somewhere hidden, to be found in Asia, Africa,

America, was the man whose ideal of life was higher than enjoyment. His caged brute of a temper offered opportunities for delicious petting; the sweetest a woman can bestow: it lifts her out of timidity into an adoration still palpitatingly fearful. Ah, but familiarity, knowledge, confirmed assurance of his character, lift her to another stage, above the pleasures. May she not prove to him how really matched with him she is, to disdain the pleasures, cheerfully accept the burdens, meet death, if need be; readily face it as the quietly grey to-morrow: at least, show herself to her hero for a woman—the incredible being to most men—who treads the terrors as well as the pleasures of humanity beneath her feet, and may therefore have some pride in her stature. Ay, but only to feel the pride of standing not so shamefully below his level beside him.

Woods were flying past the carriage-windows. Her solitary companion was of the class of the admiring gentlemen. Presently he spoke. She answered. He spoke again. Her mouth smiled, and her accompanying

look of abstract benevolence arrested the tentative allurements to conversation.

New ideas were set revolving in her. Dartrey and Victor grew to a likeness; they became hazily one man, and the mingled phantom complimented her on her preserving a good share of the beauty of her youth. The face perhaps: the figure rather too well suits the years! she replied. To reassure her, this Dartrey-Victor drew her close and kissed her; and she was confused and passed into the breast of Mrs. Burman expecting an operation at the hands of the surgeons. The train had stopped. "Penshurst?" she said.

"Penshurst is the next station," said the gentleman. Here was a theme for him! The stately mansion, the noble grounds, and Sidney! He discoursed of them. The handsome lady appeared interested. She was interested also by his description of a neighbouring village, likely one hundred years hence to be a place of pilgrimage for Americans and far Australians. Age, he said, improves true beauty; and his eyelids indicated a levelling to perform the soft intentness. Mechanically,

a ball rose in her throat; the remark was illuminated by a saying of Colney's, with regard to his countrymen at the play of courtship. No laughter came. The gentleman talked on.

All fancies and internal communications left her. Slowness of motion brought her to the plain piece of work she had to do, on a colourless earth, that seemed foggy; but one could see one's way. Resolution is a form of light, our native light in this dubious world.

Dudley Sowerby opened her carriage-door. They greeted.

"You have seen Nesta?" she said.

"Not for two days. You have not heard? The Miss Duvidneys have gone to Brighton."

"They are rather in advance of the Season."

She thanked him for meeting her. He was grateful for the summons.

Informing the mother of his betrothed, that he had ridden over from Cronidge, he speculated on the place to select for her luncheon, and he spoke of his horse being led

up and down outside the station. Nataly inquired for the hour of the next train to London. He called to one of the porters, obtained and imparted the time; evidently now, as shown by an unevenness of his lifted brows, expecting news of some little weight.

"Your husband is quite well?" he said, in affection for the name of husband.

"Mr. Radnor is well; I have to speak to you; I have more than time."

"You will lunch at the inn?"

"I shall not eat. We will walk."

They crossed the road and passed under trees.

"My mother was to have called on the Miss Duvidneys. They left hurriedly; I think it was unanticipated by Nesta. I venture . . . you pardon the liberty . . . she allows me to entertain hopes. Mr. Radnor, I am hardly too bold in thinking . . . I trust, in appealing to you . . . at least I can promise."

"Mr. Sowerby, you have done my daughter the honour to ask her hand in marriage."

He said: "I have," and had much to say besides, but deferred: a blow was visible.

The father had been more encouraging to him than the mother.

“You have not known of any circumstance that might cause hesitation in asking?”

“Miss Radnor?”

“My daughter:—you have to think of your family.”

“Indeed, Mrs. Radnor, I was coming to London to-morrow, with the consent of my family.”

“You address me as Mrs. Radnor. I have not the legal right to the name.”

“Not legal!” said he, with a catch at the word.

He spun round in her sight, though his demeanour was manfully rigid.

“Have I understood, madam? . . .”

“You would not request me to repeat it. Is that your horse the man is leading?”

“My horse: it must be my horse.”

“Mount and ride back. Leave me: I shall not eat. Reflect, by yourself. You are in the position of one who is not allowed to decide by his feelings. Mr. Radnor you know where to find.”

"But surely, some food? I cannot have misapprehended?"

"I cannot eat. I think you have understood me clearly."

"You wish me to go?"

"I beg."

"It pains me, dear madam."

"It relieves me, if you will. Here is your horse."

She gave her hand. He touched it and bent. He looked at her. A surge of impossible questions rolled to his mouth and rolled back, with the thought of an incredible thing, that her manner, more than her words, held him from doubting.

"I obey you," he said.

"You are kind."

He mounted horse, raised hat, paced on, and again bowing, to one of the wayside trees, cantered. The man was gone; but not from Nataly's vision that face of wet chalk under one of the shades of fire.

CHAPTER XI.

IN WHICH WE SEE A CONVENTIONAL GENTLE-
MAN ENDEAVOURING TO EXAMINE A
SPECTRE OF HIMSELF.

DUDLEY rode back to Cronidge with his thunderstroke. It filled him, as in those halls of political clamour, where explanatory speech is not accepted, because of a drowning tide of hot blood on both sides. He sought to win attention by submitting a resolution, to the effect, that he would the next morning enter into the presence of Mr. Victor Radnor, bearing his family's feelings, for a discussion upon them. But the brutish tumult, in addition to surcharging, encased him: he could not rightly conceive the nature of feelings: men were driving shoals; he had lost hearing and touch of individual men;

had become a house of angrily opposing parties.

He was hurt, he knew ; and therefore he supposed himself injured, though there were contrary outcries, and he admitted that he stood free ; he had not been inextricably deceived.

The girl was caught away to the thinnest of wisps in a dust-whirl. Reverting to the father and mother, his idea of a positive injury, that was not without its congratulations, sank him down among his disordered deeper sentiments ; which were a diver's wreck, where an armoured livid subtermarine, a monstrous puff-ball of man, wandered seriously light in heaviness ; trebling his hundredweights to keep him from dancing like a bladder-block of elastic lumber ; thinking occasionally, amid the mournful spectacle, of the atmospheric pipe of communication with the world above, whereby he was deafened yet sustained. One tug at it, and he was up on the surface, disengaged from the hideous harness, joyfully no more that burly phantom cleaving green slime, free ! and the roaring stopped ; the

world looked flat, foreign, a place of crusty promise. His wreck, animated by the dim strange fish below, appeared fairer ; it winked lurefully when abandoned.

The internal state of a gentleman who detested intangible metaphor as heartily as the vulgarest of our gobble-gobbets hate it, metaphor only can describe ; and for the reason, that he had in him just something more than is within the compass of the language of the meat-markets. He had—and had it not the less because he fain would not have had—sufficient stuff to furnish forth a soul's epic encounter between Nature and Circumstance : and metaphor, simile, analysis, all the fraternity of old lamps for lighting our abysmal darkness, have to be rubbed, that we may get a glimpse of the fray.

Free, and rejoicing ; without the wish to be free ; at the same time humbly and sadly acquiescing in the stronger claim of his family to pronounce the decision : such was the second stage of Dudley's perturbation after the blow. A letter of Nesta's writing was in his pocket : he knew her address. He could,

not reply to her until he had seen her father : and that interview remained necessarily prospective until he had come to his exact resolve, not omitting his critical approval of the sentences giving it shape, stamp, dignity—a noble's crest, as it were.

Nesta wrote briefly. The apostrophe was, "Dear Mr. Sowerby." She had engaged to send her address. Her father had just gone. The Miss Duvidneys had left the hotel yesterday for the furnished house facing the sea. According to arrangements, she had a livery-stable hack, and had that morning trotted out to the downs with a riding-master and company, one of whom was "an agreeable lady."

He noticed approvingly her avoidance of an allusion to the 'Delphica' of Mr. Durance's incomprehensible serial story, or whatever it was ; which, as he had shown her, annoyed him, for its being neither fact nor fun ; and she had insisted on the fun ; and he had painfully tried to see it or anything of a meaning ; and it seemed to him now, that he had been humiliated by the obedience to her

lead : she had offended by her harping upon Delphica. However, here it was unmentioned. He held the letter out to seize it in the large, entire.

Her handwriting was good, as good as the writing of the most agreeable lady on earth. Dudley did not blame her for letting the lady be deceived in her—if she knew her position. She might be ignorant of it. And to strangers, to chance acquaintances, even to friends, the position, of the loathsome name, was not materially important. Marriage altered the view. He sided with his family.

He sided, edging away, against his family. But a vision of the earldom coming to him, stirred reverential objections, composed of all which his unstained family could protest in religion, to repudiate an alliance with a stained house, and the guilty of a condonation of immorality. Who would have imagined Mr. Radnor a private sinner flaunting for one of the righteous? And she, the mother, a lady—quite a lady ; having really a sense of duty, sense of honour ! That she must be a lady, Dudley was convinced. He beheld

through a porous crape, woven of formal respectfulness, with threads of personal disgust, the scene, striking him drearily like a distant great mansion's conflagration across moorland at midnight, of a lady's breach of bonds and plunge of all for love. How had it been concealed? In Dudley's upper sphere, everything was exposed: Scandal walked naked and unashamed—figurante of the polite world. But still this lady was of the mint and coin, a true lady. Handsome now, she must have been beautiful. And a comprehensible pride (for so would Dudley have borne it) keeps the forsaken man silent up to death: . . . grandly silent; but the loss of such a woman is enough to kill a man! Not in time, though! Legitimacy evidently, by the mother's confession, cannot protect where it is wanted. Dudley was optically affected by a round spot of the world swinging its shadow over Nesta.

He pitied, and strove to be sensible of her. The effort succeeded so well, that he was presently striving to be insensible. The former state, was the mounting of a wall; the

latter, was a sinking through a chasm. There would be family consultations, abhorrent; his father's agonized amazement at the problem presented to a family of scrupulous principles and pecuniary requirements; his mother's blunt mention of the abominable name—mediaevally vindicated in champions of certain princely families indeed, but morally condemned; always under condemnation of the Church: a blot: and handed down: Posterity, and it might be a titled posterity, crying out. A man in the situation of Dudley could not think solely of himself. The nobles of the land are bound in honour to their posterity. There you have one of the prominent permanent distinctions between them and the commonalty.

His mother would again propose her chosen bride for him: Edith Averst, with the dowry of a present one thousand pounds per annum, and prospect of six or so, excluding Sir John's estate, Carping, in Leicestershire; a fair estate, likely to fall to Edith; consumption seized her brothers as they ripened. A fair girl too; only Dudley did not love her;

he wanted to love. He was learning the trick from this other one, who had become obscured and diminished, tainted, to the thought of her; yet not extinct. Sight of her was to be dreaded.

Unguiltily tainted, in herself she was innocent. That constituted the unhappy invitation to him to swallow one half of his feelings, which had his world's blessing on it, for the beneficial enlargement and enthrone-ment of the baser unblest half, which he hugged and distrusted. Can innocence issue of the guilty? He asked it, hoping it might be possible: he had been educated in his family to believe, that the laws governing human institutions are divine—until History has altered them. They are altered, to present a fresh bulwark against the infidel. His conservative mind, retiring in good order, occupied the next rearward post of resistance. Secretly behind it, the man was proud of having a heart to beat for the cause of the besieging enemy, in the present instance. When this was blabbed to him, and he had owned it, he attributed his weakness to excess

of nature, the liking for a fair face.—Oh, but more! spirit was in the sweet eyes. She led him—she did lead him in spiritual things; led him out of common circles of thought, into refreshing new spheres; he had reminiscences of his having relished the juices of the not quite obviously comic, through her indications: and really, in spite of her inferior flimsy girl's education, she could boast her acquirements; she was quick, startlingly; modest, too, in commerce with a slower mind that carried more; though she laughed and was a needle for humour: she taught him at times to put away his contempt of the romantic; she had actually shown him, that his expressed contempt of it disguised a dread: as it did, and he was conscious of the foolishness of it now while pursuing her image, while his intelligence and senses gave her the form and glory of young morning.

Wariness counselled him to think it might be merely the play of her youth; and also the disposition of a man in harness of business, exaggeratingly to prize an imagined finding of the complementary feminine of himself.

Venerating purity as he did, the question, whether the very sweetest of pure young women, having such an origin, must not at some time or other show trace of the origin, surged up. If he could only have been sure of her moral exemption from taint, a generous ardour, in reserve behind his anxious dubieties, would have precipitated Dudley to quench disapprobation and brave the world under a buckler of those monetary advantages, which he had but stoutly to plead with the House of Cantor, for the speedy overcoming of a reluctance to receive the nameless girl and prodigious heiress. His family's instruction of him, and his inherited tastes, rendered the aspect of a Nature stripped of the clothing of the laws offensive down to devilish: we grant her certain steps, upon certain conditions accompanied by ceremonies; and when she violates them, she becomes visibly again the revolutionary wicked old beast bent on levelling our sacreddest edifices. An alliance with any of her votaries, appeared to Dudley as an act of treason to his house, his class, and his tenets. And nevertheless he was

haunted by a cry of criminal happiness for and at the commission of the act. He would not decide to be 'precipitate,' and the days ran their course, until Lady Grace Halley arrived at Cronidge, a widow. Lady Cantor spoke to her of Dudley's unfathomable gloom. Lady Grace took him aside.

She said, without preface: "You've heard, have you!"

"You were aware of it?" said he, and his tone was irritable with a rebuke.

"Coming through town, for the first time yesterday. I had it—of all men!—from a Sir Abraham Quatley, to whom I was recommended to go, about my husband's shares in a South American Railway; and we talked, and it came out. *He* knows; he says, it is not generally known; and he likes, respects Mr. Victor Radnor; we are to keep the secret. Hum? He had heard of your pretensions; and our relationship, etc.: 'esteemed' it—you know the City dialect—his duty to mention, etc. That was after I had spied on his forehead the something I wormed out of his mouth. What are you going to do?"

“What can I do!”

“Are you fond of the girl?”

An attachment was indicated, as belonging to the case. She was not a woman to whom the breathing of pastoral passion would be suitable; yet he saw that she despised him for a lover; and still she professed to understand his dilemma. Perplexity at the injustice of fate and persons universally, put a wrinkled mask on his features and the expression of his feelings. They were torn, and the world was torn; and what he wanted, was delay, time for him to define his feelings and behold a recomposed picture of the world. He had already taken six days. He pleaded the shock to his family.

“You won’t have such a chance again,” she said. Shrugs had set in.

They agreed as to the behaviour of the girl’s mother. It reflected on the father, he thought.

“Difficult thing to proclaim, before an engagement!” Her shoulders were restless.

“When a man’s feelings get entangled!”

“Oh! a man’s feelings! I’m your British Jury for a woman’s.”

“He has married her?”

She declared to not knowing particulars. She could fib smoothly.

The next day she was on the line to London, armed with the proposal of an appointment for the Hon. Dudley to meet “the girl’s father.”

CHAPTER XII.

CONTAINS WHAT IS A SMALL THING OR A GREAT, AS THE SOUL OF THE CHIEF ACTOR MAY DECIDE.

SKEPSEY ushered Lady Grace into his master's private room, and entertained her during his master's absence. He had buried his wife, he said: she feared, seeing his posture of the soaping of hands at one shoulder, that he was about to bewail it; and he did wish to talk of it, to show his modest companionship with her in loss, and how a consolation for our sorrows may be obtained: but he won her approval, by taking the acceptable course between the dues to the subject and those to his hearer, as a model cab should drive considerate equally of horse and fare.

A day of holiday at Hampstead, after the

lowering of the poor woman's bones into earth, had been followed by a descent upon London; and at night he had found himself in the immediate neighbourhood of a public house, noted for sparring exhibitions and instructions on the first floor; and he was melancholy, unable quite to disperse "the ravens" flocking to us on such days: though, if we ask why we have to go out of the world, there is a corresponding inquiry, of what good was our coming into it; and unless we are doing good work for our country, the answer is not satisfactory—except, that we are as well gone. Thinking which, he was accosted by a young woman: perfectly respectable, in every way: who inquired if he had seen a young man enter the door. She described him, and reviled the temptations of those houses; and ultimately, as she insisted upon going in to look for the young man and use her persuasions to withdraw him from "that snare of Satan," he had accompanied her, and he had gone upstairs and brought the young man down. But friends, or the acquaintances they call friends, were

with him, and they were "in drink," and abused the young woman; and she had her hand on the young man's arm, quoting Scripture. Sad to relate of men bearing the name of Englishmen—and it was hardly much better if they pleaded intoxication!—they were not content to tear the young man from her grasp, they hustled her, pushed her out, dragged her in the street. "It became me to step to her defence: she was meek," said Skepsey. "She had a great opinion of the efficacy of quotations from Scripture; she did not recriminate. I was able to release her and the young man she protected, on condition of my going upstairs to give a display of my proficiency. I had assured them, that the poor fellows who stood against me were not a proper match. And of course, they jeered, but they had the evidence, on the pavement. So I went up with them. I was heavily oppressed, I wanted relief, I put on the gloves. He was a bigger man; they laughed at the little one. I told them, it depended upon a knowledge of first principles, and the power to apply them. I will not

boast, my lady : my junior by ten years, the man went down ; he went down a second time ; and the men seemed surprised ; I told them, it was nothing but first principles put into action. I mention the incident, for the extreme relief it afforded me at the close of a dark day."

"So you cured your grief!" said Lady Grace ; and Skepsey made way for his master.

Victor's festival-lights were kindled, beholding her ; cressets on the window-sill, lamps inside.

"Am I so welcome?" There was a pull of emotion at her smile. "What with your little factotum and you, we are flattered to perdition when we come here. He has been proposing, by suggestion, like a Court-physician, the putting on of his boxing-gloves, for the consolation of the widowed :—meant most kindly ! and it's a thousand pities women haven't their padded gloves."

"Oh ! but our boxing-gloves can do mischief enough. You have something to say, I see."

"How do you see ?"

“Tush, tush.”

The silly ring of her voice and the pathless tattle changed; she talked to suit her laden look. “You hit it. I come from Dudley. He knows the facts. I wish to serve you, in every way.”

Victor’s head had lifted.

“Who was it?”

“No enemy.”

“Who?”

“Her mother. She did rightly.”

“Certainly she did,” said Victor, and he thought that instantaneously of the thing done. “Oh, then she spoke to him! She has kept it from me. For now nearly a week—six days—I’ve seen her spying for something she expected, like a face behind a door three inches ajar. She has not been half alive; she refused explanations;—she was expecting to hear from him, of him—the decision, whatever it’s to be!”

“I can’t aid you there,” said Lady Grace. “He’s one of the unreadables. He names Tuesday next week.”

“By all means.”

“She?”

“Fredri?—poor Fredri!—ah, my poor girl, yes!—No, she knows nothing. Here is the truth of it:—she, the legitimate, lives: they say she lives. Well, then, she lives against all rules physical or medical, lives by sheer force of will—it’s a miracle of the power of a human creature to . . . I have it from doctors, friends, attendants, they can’t guess what she holds on, to keep her breath.—All the happiness in life!—if only it could benefit her. But it’s the cause of death to us. Do you see, dear friend;—you are a friend, proved friend,” he took her hand, and held and pressed it, in great need of a sanguine response to emphasis; and having this warm feminine hand, his ideas ran off with it. “The friend I need! You have courage. My Nataly, poor dear—she can endure, in her quiet way. A woman of courage would take her place beside me and compel the world to do her homage, help;—a bright ready smile does it! She would never be beaten. Of course, we could have lived under a bushel—stifled next to death! But

I am for light, air—battle, if you like. I want a comrade, not a —— not that I complain. I respect, pity, love—I do love her, honour: only, we want something else—courage—to face the enemy. Quite right, that she should speak to Dudley Sowerby. He has to know, must know; all who deal closely with us must know. But see a moment: I am waiting to see the impediment dispersed, which puts her at an inequality with the world: and then I speak to all whom it concerns: not before: for her sake. How is it now? Dudley will ask . . . you understand. And when I am forced to confess, that the mother, the mother of the girl he seeks in marriage, is not yet in that state herself, probably at that very instant the obstacle has crumbled to dust! I say, probably: I have information—doctors, friends, attendants—they all declare it cannot last outside a week. But you are here—true, I could swear! a touch of a hand tells me. A woman's hand? Well, yes: I read by the touch of a woman's hand:—betrays more than her looks or her lips!" He sank his

voice. "I don't talk of condoling: if you are in grief, you know I share it." He kissed her hand, and laid it on her lap; eyed it, and met her eyes; took a header into her eyes, and lost himself. A nip of his conscience moved his tongue to say: "As for guilt, if it were known . . . a couple of ascetics—absolutely!" But this was assumed to be unintelligible; and it was merely the apology to his conscience in communion with the sprite of a petticoated fair one who was being subjected to tender little liberties, necessarily addressed in enigmas. He righted immediately, under a perception of the thoroughbred's contempt for the barriers of wattled sheep; and caught the word "guilt," to hide the Philistine citizen's lapse, by relating historically, in abridgement, the honest beauty of the passionate loves of the two whom the world proscribed for honestly loving. There was no guilt. He harped on the word, to erase the recollection of his first use of it.

"Fiddle," said Lady Grace. "The thing happened. You have now to carry it through. You require a woman's aid in a

social matter. Rely on me, for what I can do. You will see Dudley on Tuesday? I will write. Be plain with him; not forgetting the gilding, I need not remark. Your Nesta has no aversion?"

"Admires, respects, likes; is quite—is willing."

"Good enough beginning." She rose, for the atmosphere was heated, rather heavy. "And if one proves to be of aid, you'll own, that a woman has her place in the battle."

The fair black-clad widow's quick and singular interwreathing of the evanescent pretty pouts and frowns dimpled like the brush of the wind on a sunny pool in a shady place; and her forehead was close below his chin, her lips not far. Her apparel was attractively mourning. Widows in mourning, when they do not lean over extremely to the Stygian shore, with the complexions of the drugs which expedited the defunct to the ferry, provoke the manly arm within reach of them to pluck their pathetic blooming persons clean away from it. What of the widow who visibly likes the living? Com-

passion, sympathy, impulse ; and gratitude, impulse again, living warmth ; and a spring of the blood to wrestle with the King of Terrors for the other poor harper's half-nightcapped Eurydice ; and a thirst, sudden as it is overpowering ; and the solicitude, a reflective solicitude, to put the seal on a thing and call it a fact, to the astonishment of history ; and a kick of our naughty youth in its coffin ;—all the insurgencies of Nature, with her colonel of the regiment absent, and her veering trick to drive two vessels at the cross of a track into collision, combine for doing that, which is very much more, and which affects us at the time so much less than did the pressure of a soft wedded hand by our own elsewhere pledged one. On the contrary, we triumph, we have the rich flavour of the fruit for our pains ; we commission the historian to write in hieroglyphs a round big fact.

The lady passed through the trial submitting, stiffening her shoulders, and at the close, shutting her eyes. She stood cool in her blush, and eyed him like one gravely

awakened. Having been embraced and kissed, she had to consider her taste for the man, and acknowledge a neatness of impetuosity in the deed; and he was neither apologizing culprit nor glorying bandit when it was done, but something of the lyric God tempering his fervours to a pleased serenity, not offering a renewal of them. He glowed transparently. He said: "You are the woman to take a front place in the battle!" With this woman beside him, it was a conquered world.

Comparisons, in the jotting souvenirs of a woman of her class and set, favoured him; for she disliked enterprising libertines and despised stumbling youths; and the genial simple glow of his look assured her, that the vanished fiery moment would not be built on by a dating master. She owned herself. Or did she? Some understanding of how the other woman had been won to the leap with him, was drawing in about her. She would have liked to beg for the story; and she could as little do that as bring her tongue to reproach. If we come to the den! she

said to her thought of reproach. Our semi-civilization makes it a den, where a scent in his nostrils will spring the half-tamed animal away to wildness. And she had come un-anticipatingly, without design, except perhaps to get a superior being to direct and restrain a gambler's hand; perhaps for the fee of a temporary pressure.

"I may be able to help a little—I hope!" she fetched a breath to say, while her eyelids mildly sermonized; and immediately she talked of her inheritance of property in stocks and shares.

Victor commented passingly on the soundness of them, and talked of projects he entertained:—Parliament! "But I have only to mention it at home, and my poor girl will set in for shrinking."

He doated on the diverse aspect of the gallant woman of the world.

"You succeed in everything you do," said she, and she cordially believed it; and that belief set the neighbour memory palpitating. Success folded her waist, was warm upon her lips: she worshipped the figure of Success.

"I can't consent to fail, it's true, when my mind is on a thing," Victor rejoined.

He looked his mind on Lady Grace. The shiver of a maid went over her. These transparent visages, where the thought which is half design is perceived as a lightning, strike lightning into the physically feeble. Her hand begged, with the open palm, her head shook thrice; and though she did not step back, he bowed to the negation, and then she gave him a grateful shadow of a smile, relieved, with a startled view of how greatly relieved, by that sympathetic deference in the wake of the capturing intrepidity.

"I am to name Tuesday for Dudley?" she suggested.

"At any hour he pleases to appoint."

"A visit signifies . . ."

"Whatever it signifies!"

"I'm thinking of the bit of annoyance."

"To me? Anything appointed, finds me ready the next minute."

Her smile was flatteringly bright. "By the way, keep your City people close about you: entertain as much as possible; dine them," she said.

“ At home ? ”

“ Better. Sir Rodwell Blachington, Sir Abraham Quatley : and their wives. There’s no drawing back now. And I will meet them.”

She received a compliment. She was on the foot to go.

But she had forgotten the Tiddler mine.

The Tiddler mine was leisurely mounting. Victor stated the figures ; he saluted her hand, and Lady Grace passed out, with her heart on the top of them, and a buzz about it of the unexpected having occurred. She had her experiences to match new patterns in events ; though not very many. Compared with gambling, the game of love was an idle entertainment. Compared with other players, this man was gifted.

Victor went in to Mr. Inchling’s room, and kept Inchling from speaking, that he might admire him for he knew not what, or knew not well what. The good fellow was devoted to his wife. Victor in old days had called the wife Mrs. Grundy. She gossiped, she was censorious ; she knew—could not but know—

the facts; yet never by a shade was she disrespectful. He had a curious recollection of how his knowledge of Inchling and his wife being always in concert, entirely—whatever they might think in private—devoted to him in action, had influenced, if it had not originally sprung, his resolve to cast off the pestilential cloak of obscurity shortening his days, and emerge before a world he could illumine to give him back splendid reflections. Inchling and his wife, it was: because the two were one: and if one, and subservient to him, knowing all the story, why, it foreshadowed a conquered world! They were the one pulse of the married Grundy beating in his hand. So it had been.

He rattled his views upon Indian business, to hold Inchling silent, and let his mind dwell almost lovingly on the good faithful spouse, who had no phosphorescent writing of a recent throbbing event on the four walls of his room.

Nataly was not so generously encountered in idea.

He felt and regretted this. He greeted

her with a doubled affectionateness. Her pitiable deficiency of courage, excusing a man for this and that small matter in the thick of the conflict, made demands on him for gentle treatment.

“You have not seen any one?” she asked.

“City people. And you, my love?”

“Mr. Barmby called. He has gone down to Tunbridge Wells for a week, to some friend there.” She added, in pain of thought: “I have seen Dartrey. He has brought Lord Clanconan to town, for a consultation, and expects he will have to take him to Brighton.”

“Brighton? What a life for a man like Dartrey, at Brighton!”

Her breast heaved. “If I cannot see my Nesta there, he will bring her up to me for a day.”

“But, my dear, I will bring her up to you, if it is your wish to see her.”

“It is becoming imperative that I should.”

“No hurry, no hurry: wait till the end of next week. And I must see Dartrey, on business, at once!”

She gave the address in a neighbouring

square. He had minutes to spare before dinner, and flew. She was not inquisitive.

Colney Durance had told Dartrey, that Victor was killing her. She had little animation; her smiles were ready, but faint. After her interview with Dudley, there had been a swoon at home; and her maid, sworn to secrecy, willingly spared a tender-hearted husband—so good a master.

CHAPTER XIII.

MRS. MARSETT.

LITTLE acts of kindness were not beyond the range of Colney Durance, and he ran down to Brighton, to give the exiled Nesta some taste of her friendly London circle. The Duvidney ladies knew that the dreaded gentleman had a regard for the girl. Their own, which was becoming warmer than they liked to think, was impressed by his manner of conversing with her. "Child though she was," he paid her the compliment of a sober, as well as a satirical review of the day's political matter and recent publications; and the ladies were introduced, in a wonderment, to the damsel Delphica. They listened placidly to a discourse upon her performances, Japanese to their understandings. At New

York, behold, another adventurous representative and advocate of the European tongues has joined the party: Signor Jeridomani: a philologer, of course; a politician in addition; Macchiavelli redivivus, it seems to fair Delphica. The speech he delivers at the Syndicate Delmonico Dinner, is justly applauded by the New York Press as a masterpiece of astuteness. He appears to be the only one of the party who has an eye for the dark. She fancies she may know a more widely awake in the abstract. But now, thanks to jubilant Journals and Homeric laughter over the Continent, the secret is out, in so far as the concurrents are all unmasked and exposed for the edification of the American public. Dr. Bouthoin's eyebrows are up, Mr. Semhians disfigures his name by greatly gaping. Shall they return to their Great Britain indignant? Patriotism, with the sauce of a luxurious expedition at no cost to the private purse, restrains them. Moreover, there is no sign of any one of the others intending to quit the expedition; and Mr. Semhians has done a marvel or two in

the cricket-field: Old England looks up where she can. What is painfully extraordinary to our couple, they find in the frigid attitude of the Americans toward their 'common tongue;' together with the rumour of a design to despatch an American rival emissary to Japan.

Nesta listened, inquired, commented, laughed; the ladies could not have a doubt that she was interested and understood. She would have sketches of scenes between Delphica and M. Falarique, with whom the young Germania was cleverly ingenuous indeed—a seminary Célimène; and between Delphica and M. Mytharete, with whom she was archæological, ravishingly amœbæan of Homer. Dr. Gannius holds a trump card in his artless daughter, conjecturally, for the establishment of the language of the gutturals in the far East. He has now a suspicion, that the inventive M. Falarique, melted down to sobriety by misfortune, may some day startle their camp by the cast of more than a crow into it, and he is bent on establishing alliances; frightens the supple Signor Jeridomani to lingual fixity; eulogizes Football,

with Dr. Bouthoin ; and retracts, or modifies, his dictum upon the English, that, ‘ masculine brawn they have in their bodies, but muscle they have not in their feminine minds ;’ to exalt them, for a signally clean, if a dense, people : “ Amousia, not Alousia, is their enemy.”—How, when we have the noblest crop of poets?—“ You have never heartily embraced those aliens among you until you learnt from us, that you might brag of them.”—Have they not endowed us with the richest of languages?—“ The words of which are used by you, as old slippers, for puns.” Mr. Semhians has been superciliously and ineffectively punning in foreign presences : he and his chief are inwardly shocked by a new perception ;—What if, now that we have the populace for paymaster, subservience to the literary tastes of the populace should reduce the nation to its lowest mental level, and render us not only unable to compete with the foreigner, but unintelligible to him, although so proudly paid at home ! Is it not thus that nations are seen of the Highest to be devouring themselves ? “ For,” says Dr.

Gannius, as if divining them, "this excessive and applauded productiveness, both of your juvenile and your senile, in your modern literature, is it ever a crop? Is it even the restorative perishable stuff of the markets? Is it not rather your street-pavement's patter of raindrops, incessantly in motion, and as fruitful?" Mr. Semhians appeals to Delphica. "Genius you have," says she, stiffening his neck-band, "genius in superabundance:"—he throttles to the complexion of the peony:—"perhaps criticism is wanting." Dr. Gannius adds: "Perhaps it is the drill-sergeant everywhere wanting for an unrivalled splendid rabble!"

Colney left the whole body of concurrents on the raised flooring of a famous New York Hall, clearly entrapped, and incited to debate before an enormous audience, as to the merits of their respective languages. "I hear," says Dr. Bouthoin to Mr. Semhians (whose gape is daily extending), "that the tickets cost ten dollars!"

There was not enough of Delphica for Nesta.

Colney asked : "Have you seen any of our band?"

"No," she said, with good cheer, and became thoughtful, conscious of a funny reason for the wish to hear of the fictitious creature disliked by Dudley. A funny and a naughty reason, was it? Not so very naughty: but it was funny; for it was a spirit of opposition to Dudley, without an inferior feeling at all, such as girls should have.

Colney brought his viola for a duet; they had a pleasant musical evening, as in old days at Creckholt; and Nesta, going upstairs with the ladies to bed, made them share her father's amused view of the lamb of the flock this bitter gentleman became when he had the melodious instrument tucked under his chin. He was a guest for the night. Dressing in the early hour, Nesta saw him from her window on the parade, and soon joined him, to hear him at his bitterest, in the flush of the brine. "These lengths of blank-faced terraces fronting sea!" were the satirist's present black beast. "So these

moneyed English shoulder to the front place ; and that is the appearance they offer to their commercial God ! ” He gazed along the miles of “ English countenance,” drearily laughing. Changeful ocean seemed to laugh at the spectacle. Some Orphic joke inspired his exclamation : “ Capital ! ”

“ Come where the shops are,” said Nesta.

“ And how many thousand parsons have you here ? ”

“ Ten, I think,” she answered in his vein, and warmed him ; leading him contemplatively to scrutinize her admirers : the Rev. Septimus ; Mr. Sowerby.

“ News of our friend of the whimpering flute ? ”

“ Here ? no. I have to understand you ! ”

Colney cast a weariful look backward on the “ regiments of Anglo-Chinese ” represented to him by the moneyed terraces, and said : “ The face of a stopped watch !—the only meaning it has is past date.”

He had no liking for Dudley Sowerby. But it might have been an allusion to the general view of the houses. But again, “ the

meaning of it past date," stuck in her memory. A certain face close on handsome, had a fatal susceptibility to caricature.

She spoke of her 'exile'; wanted Skepsey to come down to her; moaned over the loss of her Louise. The puzzle of the reason for the long separation from her parents, was evident in her mind, and unmentioned.

They turned on to the pier.

Nesta reminded him of certain verses he had written to celebrate her visit to the place when she was a child :

*" ' And then along the pier we sped, •
And there we saw a Whale :
He seemed to have a Normous Head,
And not a bit of Tail.' "*

" Manifestly a foreigner to our shores, where the exactly inverse condition rules," Colney said.

*" ' And then we scampered on the beach,
To chase the foaming wave ;
And when we ran beyond its reach
We all became more brave.' "*

Colney remarked : " I was a poet—for once."

A neat-legged Parisianly-booted lady, having the sea-winds very enterprising with her dark wavy locks and jacket and skirts, gave a cry of pleasure and a silvery "You dear!" at sight of Nesta; then at sight of one of us, moderated her tone to a propriety equalling the most conventional. "We ride to-day?"

"I shall be one," said Nesta.

"It would not be the commonest pleasure to me, if you were absent."

"Till eleven, then!"

"After my morning letter to Ned."

She sprinkled silvery sound on that name or on the adieu, blushed, blinked, frowned, sweetened her lip-lines, bit at the underone, and passed in a discomposure.

"The lady?" Colney asked,

"She is—I meet her in the troop conducted by the riding-master: Mrs. Marsett."

"And who is Ned?"

"It is her husband, to whom she writes every morning. He is a captain in the army, or was. He is in Norway, fishing."

"Then the probability is, that the English officer continues his military studies."

"Do you not think her handsome, Mr Durance?"

"Ned may boast of his possession, when he has trimmed it and toned it a little."

"She is different, if you are alone with her."

"It is not unusual," said Colney.

At eleven o'clock he was in London, and Nesta rode beside Mrs. Marsett amid the troop.

A South-easterly wind blew the waters to shifty gold-leaf prints of brilliance under the sun.

"I took a liberty this morning, I called you 'Dear' this morning," the lady said. "It's what I feel, only I have no right to blurt out everything I feel, and I was ashamed. I am sure I must have appeared ridiculous. I got quite nervous."

"You would not be ridiculous to me."

"I remember I spoke of Ned."

"You have spoken of him before."

"Oh! I know: to you alone. I should like to pluck out my heart and pitch it on the waves, to see whether it would sink or

swim. That's a funny idea, isn't it! I tell you everything that comes up. What shall I do when I lose you! You always make me feel you've a lot of poetry ready-made in you."

"We will write. And you will have your husband then."

"When I had finished my letter to Ned, I dropped my head on it and behaved like a fool for several minutes. I can't bear the thought of losing you!"

"But you don't lose me," said Nesta; "there is no ground for your supposing that you will. And your wish not to lose me, binds me to you more closely."

"If you knew!" Mrs. Marsett caught at her slippery tongue, and she carolled: "If we all knew everything, we should be wiser, and what a naked lot of people we should be!"

They were crossing the passage of a cavalcade of gentlemen, at the end of the East Cliff. One among them, large and dominant, with a playful voice of brass, cried out: "And how do you do, Mrs. Judith Marsett—ha? Beautiful morning?"

Mrs. Marsett's figure tightened; she rode

stonily erect, looked level ahead. Her woman's red mouth was shut fast on a fighting underlip.

"He did not salute you," Nesta remarked, to justify her for not having responded.

The lady breathed a low thunder: "Coward!"

"He cannot have intended to insult you," said Nesta.

"That man knows I will not notice him. He is a beast. He will learn that I carry a horsewhip."

"Are you not taking a little incident too much to heart?"

The sigh of the heavily laden came from Mrs. Marsett: "Am I pale? I dare say. I shall go on my knees to-night hating myself that I was born 'one of the frail sex.' We are, or we should ride at the coward and strike him to the ground. Pray, pray do not look distressed! Now you know my Christian name. That dog of a man barks it out on the roads. It doesn't matter."

"He has offended you before?"

"You are near me. They can't hurt me,

can't touch me, when I think that I'm talking with you. How I envy those who call you by your Christian name ! ”

“Nesta,” said smiling Nesta. The smile was forced, that she might show kindness, for the lady was jarring on her.

Mrs. Marsett opened her lips : “ Oh, my God, I shall be crying !—let's gallop. No, wait, I'll tell you. I wish I could ! I will tell you of that man. That man is Major Worrell. One of the majors who manage to get to their grade. A retired warrior. He married a handsome woman, above him in rank, with money ; a good woman. She was a good woman, or she would have had her vengeance, and there was never a word against her. She must have loved that—Ned calls him, full-blooded ox. He spent her money and he deceived her.—You innocent ! Oh, you dear ! I'd give the world to have your eyes. I've heard tell of ‘crystal clear,’ but eyes like yours have to tell me how deep and clear. Such a world for them to be in ! I did pray, and used your name last night on my knees, that you—I said Nesta—might

never have to go through other women's miseries. Ah me! I have to tell you he deceived her. You don't quite understand."

"I do understand," said Nesta.

"God help you!—I am excited to-day. That man is poison to me. His wife forgave him three times. On three occasions, that unhappy woman forgave him. He is great at his oaths, and a big breaker of them. She walked out one November afternoon and met him riding along with a notorious creature. You know there are bad women. They passed her, laughing. And look there, Nesta, see that groyne; that very one." Mrs. Marsett pointed her whip hard out. "The poor lady went down from the height *here*; she walked into that rough water—look!—steadyng herself along it, and she plunged; she never came out alive. A week after her burial, Major Worrell—I've told you enough."

"We'll gallop now," said Nesta.

Mrs. Marsett's talk, her presence hardly less, affected the girl with those intimations of tumult shown upon smooth waters when the great elements are conspiring. She felt

that there was a cause why she had to pity, did pity her. It might be, that Captain Marsett wedded one who was of inferior station, and his wife had to bear blows from cruel people. The supposition seemed probable. The girl accepted it; for beyond it, as the gathering of the gale masked by hills, lay a brewing silence. What? She did not reflect. Her quick physical sensibility curled to some breath of heated atmosphere brought about her by this new acquaintance: not pleasant, if she had thought of pleasure: intensely suggestive of our life at the consuming tragic core, round which the furnace pants. But she was unreflecting, feeling only a beyond and hidden.

Besides, she was an exile. Spelling at dark things in the dark, getting to have the sight which peruses darkness, she touched the door of a mystery, that denied her its key, but showed the lock; and her life was beginning to know of hours that fretted her to recklessness. Her friend Louise was absent: she had so few friends—owing to that unsolved reason: she wanted one, of any kind, if only

gentle : and this lady seemed to need her : and she flattered ; Nesta was in the mood for swallowing and digesting and making sweet blood of flattery.

At one time, she liked Mrs. Marsett best absent : in musing on her, wishing her well, having said the adieu. For it was wearisome to hear praises of 'innocence ;' and women can do so little to cure that 'wickedness of men,' among the lady's conversational themes ; and 'love' too : it may be a 'plague,' and it may be 'heaven :' it is better left unspoken of. But there were times when Mrs. Marsett's looks and tones touched compassion to press her hand : an act that had a pledgeing signification in the girl's bosom : and when, by the simple avoidance of ejaculatory fervours, Mrs. Marsett's quieted good looks had a shadow of a tender charm, more pathetic than her outcries were. These had not always the sanction of polite usage : and her English was guilty of sudden lapses to the Thames-water English of commerce and drainage instead of the upper wells. But there are many uneducated ladies in the land. Many, too,

whose tastes in romantic literature betray now and then by peeps a similarity to Nesta's maid Mary's. Mrs. Marsett liked love, blood, and adventure. She had, moreover, a favourite noble poet, and she begged Nesta's pardon for naming him, and she would not name him, and told her she must not read him until she was a married woman, because he did mischief to girls. Thereupon she fell into one of her silences, emerging with a cry of hate of herself for having ever read him. She did not blame the bard. And, ah, poor bard ! he fought his battle : he shall not be named for the brand on the name. He has lit a sulphur match for the lower of nature through many a generation ; and to be forgiven by sad frail souls who could accuse him of pipeing devil's agent to them at the perilous instant—poor girls too !—is chastisement enough. This it is to be the author of unholy sweets : a Posterity sitting in judgement will grant, that they were part of his honest battle with the hypocrite English Philistine, without being dupe of the plea or at all the thirsty swallower of his sugary

brandy. Mrs. Marsett expressed aloud her gladness of escape in never having met a man like him; followed by her regret that 'Ned' was so utterly unlike; except "perhaps"—and she hummed; she was off on the fraternity in wickedness.

Nesta's ears were fatigued. "My mother writes of you," she said, to vary the subject.

Mrs. Marsett looked. She sighed downright: "I have had my dream of a friend!—It was that gentleman with you on the pier! Your mother objects?"

"She has inquired, nothing more."

"I am not twenty-three: not as old as I should be, for a guide to you. I know I would never do you harm. That I know. I would walk into that water first, and take Mrs. Worrell's plunge:—the last bath; a thorough cleanser for a woman! Only, she was a good woman and didn't want it, as we—as lots of us do:—to wash off all recollection of having met a man! Your mother would not like me to call you Nesta! I have never begged you to call me Judith. Damnable name!" Mrs. Marsett revelled in the

heat of the curse on it, as a relief to torture of the breast, until a sense of the girl's alarmed hearing sent the word reverberating along her nerves and shocked her with such an exposure of our Shaggy wild one on a lady's lips. She murmured: "Forgive me," and had the passion to repeat the epithet in shrieks, and scratch up male speech for a hatefuller; but the twitch of Nesta's brows made her say: "Do pardon me. I did something in Scripture. Judith could again. Since that brute Worrell crossed me riding with you, I loathe my name; I want to do things. I have offended you."

"We have been taught differently. I do not use those words. Nothing else."

"They frighten you."

"They make me shut; that is all."

"Supposing you were some day to discover . . . ta-ta-ta, all the things there are in the world." Mrs. Marsett let fly an artificial chirrup. "You must have some ideas of me."

"I think you have had unhappy experiences."

"Nesta . . . just now and then! . . . the

first time we rode out together, coming back from the downs, I remember, I spoke, without thinking—I was enraged—of a case in the newspapers; and you had seen it, and you were not afraid to talk of it. I remember I thought, Well, for a girl she's bold! I thought you knew more than a girl ought to know: until—you did—you set my heart going. You spoke of the poor women like an angel of compassion. You said, we were all mixed up with their fate—I forget the words. But no one ever heard in Church anything that touched me so. I worshipped you. You said, you thought of them often, and longed to find out what you could do to help. And I thought, if they could hear you, and only come near you, as I was—ah, my heaven!—Unhappy experiences? Yes. But when men get women on the slope to their perdition, they have no mercy, none. They deceive, and they lie; they are false in acts and words; they do as much as murder. They're never hanged for it. They make the laws! And then they become fathers of families, and point the finger at the 'wretched creatures.'

They have a dozen names against women, for one at themselves."

"It maddens me at times to think! . . ." said Nesta, burning with the sting of vile names.

"Oh, there are bad women as well as bad men: but men have the power and the lead, and they take advantage of it; and then they turn round and execrate us for not having what they have robbed us of!"

"I blame women—if I may dare, at my age," said Nesta, and her bosom heaved. "Women should feel for their sex; they should not allow the names; they should go among their unhappier sisters. At the worst, they are sisters! I am sure, that fallen cannot mean—Christ shows it does not. He changes the tone of Scripture. The women who are made outcasts, must be hopeless and go to utter ruin. We should, if we pretend to be better, step between them and that. There cannot be any goodness unless it is a practised goodness. Otherwise it is nothing more than paint on canvas. You speak to me of my innocence. What is it worth, if

it is only a picture and does no work to help to rescue? I fear I think most of the dreadful names that redden and sicken us.—The Old Testament! — I have a French friend, a Mademoiselle Louise de Seilles—you should hear her: she is intensely French, and a Roman Catholic, everything which we are not: but so human, so wise, and so full of the pride of her sex! I love her. It is love. She will never marry until she meets a man who has the respect for women, for all women. We both think we cannot separate ourselves from our sisters. She seems to me to wither men, when she speaks of their injustice, their snares to mislead and their cruelty when they have succeeded. She is right, it is the—brute: there is no other word.”

“And French and good!” Mrs. Marsett ejaculated. “My Ned reads French novels, and he says, their women. . . . But your mademoiselle is a real one. If she says all that, I could kneel to her, French or not. Does she talk much about men and women?”

“Not often: we lose our tempers. She wants women to have professions; at present

they have not much choice to avoid being penniless. Poverty, and the sight of luxury! It seems as if we produced the situation, to create an envious thirst, and cause the misery. Things are improving for them; but we groan at the slowness of it."

Mrs. Marsett now declared a belief, that women were nearly quite as bad as men. "I don't think I could take up with a profession. Unless to be a singer. Ah! Do you sing?"

Nesta smiled: "Yes, I sing."

"How I should like to hear you! My Ned's a thorough Englishman—gentleman, you know: he cares only for sport; Shooting, Fishing, Hunting; and Football, Cricket, Rowing, and matches. He's immensely proud of England in those things. And such muscle he has!—though he begins to fancy his heart's rather weak. It's digestion, I tell him. But he takes me to the Opera sometimes—Italian Opera; he can't stand German. Down at his place in Leicestershire, he tells me, when there's company, he has—I'm sure you sing beautifully. When I hear beautiful singing,

even from a woman they tell tales of, upon my word, it's true, I feel my sins all melting out of me and I'm new-made: I can't bear Ned to speak. Would you one day, one afternoon, before the end of next week?—it would do me such real good, you can't guess how much; if I could persuade you! I know I'm asking something out of rules. For just half an hour! I judge by your voice in talking. Oh! it would do me good—good—good to hear you sing. There is a tuned piano—a cottage; I don't think it sounds badly. You would not see any great harm in calling on me?—once!”

“No,” said Nesta. And it was her nature that projected the word. Her awakened wits were travelling to her from a distance, and she had an intimation of their tidings; and she could not have said what they were; or why, for a moment, she hesitated to promise she would come. Her vision of the reality of things was without written titles, to put the stamp of the world on it. She felt this lady to be one encompassed and in the hug of the elementary forces, which are the

terrors to inexperienced pure young women. But she looked at her, and dared trust those lips, those eyes. She saw, through whatever might be the vessel, the spirit of the woman ; as the upper nobility of our brood are enabled to do in a crisis mixed of moral aversion and sisterly sympathy, when nature cries to them, and the scales of convention, the mud-spots of accident, even naughtiness, even wickedness, all misfortune's issue, if we but see the one look upward, fall away. Reason is not excluded from these blind throbs of a blood that strikes to right the doings of the Fates. Nesta did not err in her divination of the good and the bad incarnate beside her, though both good and bad were behind a curtain ; the latter sparing her delicate senses, appealing to chivalry, to the simply feminine claim on her. Reason, acting in her heart as a tongue of the flames of the forge where we all are wrought, told her surely that the good predominated. She had the heart which is at our primal fires when nature speaks.

She gave the promise to call on Mrs. Marsett and sing to her.

“An afternoon? Oh! what afternoon?” she was asked, and she said: “This afternoon, if you like.”

So it was agreed: Mrs. Marsett acted violently the thrill of delight she felt in the prospect.

The ladies Dorothea and Virginia consulted, and pronounced the name of Marsett to be a reputable County name. “There was a Leicestershire baronet of the name of Marsett.” They arranged to send their button-blazing boy at Nesta’s heels. Mrs. Marsett resided in a side-street not very distant from the featureless but washed and orderly terrace of the glassy stare at sea.

END OF VOL. II.

